

Article

Thousands of Glittering Shards: Spirituality as Resonance in the Lives of People with Intellectual Disabilities

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Abstract: In the Kabbalah creation myth, God creates the universe by “stepping back”, releasing ten holy vessels with his light—only to have those vessels shatter with shards of divine light, or “shards” scattered throughout the earth. In a parallel approach, this paper suggests that *the sacred* must be sought in diverse encounters within everyday life and professional practice. In counseling or other therapeutic support, the definition of and search for spiritual dimensions must be broadened to thoughtfully incorporate the diverse experiences and expressions of people with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, those who seek to understand people’s relationship with the divine and support meaning in their lives must welcome a wide range of “artistic” engagements, an approach exemplified in grief and loss intervention. This article concludes by pointing towards *resonance* as a helpful concept to reconceptualize accessible spirituality in future work.

Keywords: spirituality; intellectual disability; therapy; pastoral care; resonance; support

1. Introduction

In my role as a practical theologian supporting the work of a large, faith-based provider of developmental services in Canada I frequently encounter situations where people with intellectual disabilities need professional counseling or other forms of therapeutic support. Often, it is not accessible to them. They may not have the financial resources to engage counselors. Woefully inadequate funding exists for covering such services. If they can afford a counselor or therapist, these professionals typically have not been trained to communicate with or understand the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. These factors, combined with many professionals’ general discomfort with approaching spiritual matters, result in limited spiritual counseling support options and possibilities for a demographic with as much spiritual interest as the general population (Ault et al. 2013; Carter 2021).

John Swinton (2002) observes that “The spirituality of people with [intellectual disabilities] is under-researched and frequently misunderstood”. The aim of this article is twofold. First, widening an appreciation for the diversity of modes of spiritual engagement will help counselors, therapists, and pastors better support verbal and non-verbal communication and expression of the sacred in their sessions and conversations with people with intellectual disabilities. Expanding our notions of what is spiritual beyond the fraught realms of interreligious tensions, helps make the sacred more approachable and accessible. Second, a greater appreciation for the diversity of spiritual experience—particularly, but not exclusively, in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities—will equip the wider supportive community (including direct support professionals, friends, family, and faith community members) to create an environment where people’s spiritual needs are already largely met outside of a professional therapeutic context. Approaches from the world of art and artistic expression (broadly understood) and grief support will help to expand these notions of spirituality and the sacred. In conclusion, I suggest that Hartmut Rosa’s research on resonance—a space between the controllable and the uncontrollable, the known and the mysterious—provides a helpful lens for the generous and expeditionary spirit of this



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work. Resonance may be a fruitful framework within which to pursue future research and equipping, as it is approachable from both religious and non-religious perspectives.

2. Thousands of Glittering Shards

According to ancient Kabbalistic tradition, a catastrophe occurred during the process of creation. In the beginning, God's presence filled the universe. God (or G-d) had to "step back", in a sense, to make room for creation and free will. When God said "Let there be light", (Gen. 1:3) ten vessels came forth, filled with divine light. These vessels were intended to contain His light and channel it into the physical world. The vessels were too fragile to contain the holy light. They shattered, "like sand, like seeds, like stars" scattering the sparks everywhere (Adler 2016).

This creation story explains the mixture of the goodness and evil we discover in the world and ourselves. After the "breaking of the vessels", the process of *Tikkun* or spiritual repair calls each one of us to discover and reclaim holy sparks—to transform the world through kindness, prayer, and spiritual growth. The Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam*, then, means working toward this repaired or perfected world where the vessels are restored. According to this tradition, we can each participate in the ongoing creation of a just and equitable world, repairing damage and seeking the good in these thousands of glittering shards in the world around us.

In "Toward a Therapeutic Use of Spirituality among Individuals with Mild to Moderate Intellectual Disabilities" (Lee 2015), Tony Lee suggests that due to its multiple connection points with various religious traditions, Kabbalistic principles provide a useful therapeutic basis for working with people with intellectual disabilities. Whether or not one concurs with Lee's approach, the creation myth alone presents a vivid metaphorical framework for exploring, supporting, and learning from the spiritual beliefs, practices, and experiences of people with intellectual disabilities. Rather than confining spiritual curiosity to narrowly defined religious beliefs or cognitively-biased conversations, counselors, chaplains, faith leaders, and support professionals must shatter existing expectations as we seek to understand *meaning* and *spirituality* in diverse and scattered places. A world where the spiritual and therapeutic needs of people with intellectual disabilities are constantly undermined and left unmet is broken indeed. The answer is a genuine openness to the variety of religious and spiritual experiences of people with intellectual disabilities. This posture helps to "restore the world", or at least this particular aspect of the world, as the spiritual needs and contributions of people with intellectual disabilities are no longer discounted but are valued and respected in equity with the needs of non-disabled people.

3. Defining and Demystifying "Spirituality"

We cannot fully benefit from diverse liberal societies without being willing to engage with all aspects of human diversity, including religious and spiritual diversity. Too often, sometimes even in the name of tolerance or kindness, professionals avoid engaging with spiritual traditions, expressions, and beliefs for fear of provoking tension or conflict. Ironically, those who avoid religious conversations for fear of disagreement are likely best suited to approach others with a spirit of curiosity rather than judgment, a spirit that looks for goodness, truth, and beauty in the areas that form someone's deepest identity. To seek these "shards of light" in contemporary culture requires a broad and generous understanding of spirituality. While spirituality and religion are closely intertwined for many communities, spiritual beliefs, practices, and experiences extend beyond religious boundaries. Ault et al. (2013) observe that,

Religion and spirituality are separate, yet interrelated, constructs. Spirituality usually is characterized as a personal experience of an individual searching for meaning, a higher power, or 'the sacred' that is accomplished through 'inner peace, harmony, or connectedness to others. (p. 48, c.f. Boswell et al. 2006, p. 593)

Karaca and Şener (2020) agree that "today, [spirituality] encompasses a broader concept beyond that of religious beliefs; spirituality also includes elements that address the meaning

of life" (pp. 112–13). They go on to reinforce the importance of interpersonal relationships in this meaning–creation, and that spirituality "includes elements regarding the purpose of life that are meaningful to the individual" (pp. 112–13). Going forward then, spirituality is defined in the following way:

Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred. (Puchalski et al. 2009, p. 887)

Fostering a simple and respectful curiosity about *what is important* to people with intellectual disabilities, without limiting topics or areas that are "off limits" in this regard, such as religion, helps to reduce fears related to exploring spirituality and significance in their lives. This approach aligns with a "dignity of risk" that, rather than paternalistically assuming what may or may not be important to someone with an intellectual disability, sincerely looks to learn from them, with regard to what shapes meaning and purpose in their life.

4. Therapeutic Engagement of Spirituality

Why engage spirituality or religion in the first place? Why pursue these sparks of light, or seek to understand someone's relation to the spiritual or the divine? With the potential for communication difficulties and a societal hesitation to broach the topic, it could be argued that it is not worth the effort to understand the significant or the sacred from the perspective of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

4.1. Embracing the Therapeutic Possibilities of Spirituality

The first argument toward seeking out the spiritual lives of people with disabilities and their families is that spirituality provides positive coping strategies and can be a source of healing and support upon which to draw.

4.1.1. The role of Spirituality and Religion in the Lives of People with Intellectual Disabilities

Spiritual expression and religious participation are strongly associated with quality of life for individuals with and without disabilities (Ault et al. 2013, p. 49). Although sample sizes in these studies tend to be small (<50 participants), in the work of Shogren and Rye (2005) 76% of the adults they interviewed with intellectual disabilities reported attending worship services and the majority confirmed that they believed in God and used positive coping strategies. Sango and Forrester-Jones (2022) discovered that participants valued the psychological benefits of church attendance and spiritual practices as well. "These practices not only enable individuals to connect with family and friends but also to connect with . . . transcendence, which seems to help them by yielding a sense of peace, especially through difficult times." In an earlier paper, Sango and Forrester-Jones (2018) relayed that "spirituality is at least as important as other quality of life dimensions for people with IDD [Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities], and also has implications for the development and maintenance of social networks" (p. 282). They indicate that spirituality offers "communal and social gains . . . connecting persons with ID [Intellectual Disabilities] to friendships that are essential to feeling a sense of community and belonging" (p. 199).

It should be noted that "coping strategies" do not necessarily relate to disability itself. While many assume that disability is accompanied by suffering, this is not necessarily the case for people with disabilities themselves or for their families. This blanket assumption perpetuates stigmatizing attitudes about disability and disabled experiences. In religious communities, for example, it can promote an attitude that people with disabilities need to "be healed" of their disability, which might instead be a meaningful and identity-forming aspect of their lives and experience. Coping strategies are needed as much or more to counteract societal barriers, misperceptions, and stigmatizing attitudes about disability as functional or cognitive limitations themselves. Thankfully, the work of Beart et al. (2005)

indicates that despite intellectual disability carrying a powerful and stigmatizing social identity, many people with intellectual disabilities appear to be unaware of or unfazed by these social perceptions. Nonetheless, professionals should appreciate and support the helpful possibilities of spirituality as part of a coping strategy to navigate the modern world—related or unrelated to the disabled experience.

From a Jewish perspective, Stephen Glicksman (2011) points to *ritual practice, inclusion opportunities, and community growth* as three broad areas where religious life and ritual can enhance people's quality of life. Unfortunately, as he observes, "There is very little published research . . . on the spiritual life of people with intellectual disability themselves" (p. 398). Glicksman indicates several crucial areas of a supportive spiritual or religious framework in the lives of people with intellectual disability, but also to the need for further research that centers the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities.

4.1.2. The Role of Spirituality and Religion in the Lives of Family Members

Spirituality and religion have been shown not only to have a positive impact on the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities but also in the lives of their families. This can relate to positive coping strategies for parents adjusting expectations for life with a child with an intellectual disability, for the health challenges that can be associated with disability or illness, or for the societal perceptions and barriers that families can face. In their study of mothers of children with developmental disabilities in Turkey, Karaca and Şener (2020), they found that,

Spirituality encompasses moral values and religious beliefs and is an instrument that mothers of children with developmental disabilities can use to help them understand and accept their current situation. (p. 112)

Similarly, Michie and Skinner (2010) discovered that spirituality helps to provide a "reconciliation narrative" for mothers of children with Fragile X Syndrome. Of the 60 mothers they interviewed, 37 (62%) "indicated in their narratives (through substantive references to God, faith, and/or religious practices such as prayer) that religion was a significant source of meaning, support, or encouragement to them in their daily lives" (p. 5). Thirty-three mothers (55%) in this study indicated that their religious faith had helped them "quite a bit" or "a lot" in understanding fragile X in their family (p. 5). The authors continue to indicate that the mothers did not simply look to biomedical genetic models of the disease, but relied upon other interpretive frameworks alongside these models—a significant one being their religious understanding of the world (p. 6). This religious and spiritual framework offered the mothers a narrative path to help reconcile their knowledge of their children's disease with their own lives and experience of their world.

This work is reinforced by the conclusions of Mirza et al. (2009) in a mixed-method study with Pakistani families with a family member with an intellectual disability. These families relied on Allah to get through troubling times—a trend consistent with other faiths and ethnicities.

Going beyond coping mechanisms, which can perpetuate a belief that having an intellectual disability or being a family member of someone with a disability is primarily a difficult or challenging experience, Ekas et al. (2019) discovered that "mothers with higher levels of spirituality reported their child with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] made more positive contributions to their lives" (p. 4554). In other words, spirituality helped these mothers acknowledge and celebrate the positive contributions and impact of their children with autism, including the child being a source of pride, bringing the family closer together, thus contributing to the mother's personal growth, and providing happiness and fulfillment (p. 4554).

While further research is needed, particularly in relation to the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities themselves, the studies explored here found that, for many families, spirituality and religion offer support, encouragement, and a positive outlook (c.f. Poston and Turnbull 2004).

4.2. Countering the Destructive Potential of Spirituality

While religious beliefs and spiritual practices often have a positive impact on mental health and coping strategies, this is not the case for everyone. People's engagement with religious beliefs, faith communities, and spirituality might have a negative impact in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Poston and Turnbull (2004) indicate that in their study, disability was at times seen as a trial from God, a result of sin in a previous lifetime, or as a result of a parent's sins. In Michie and Skinner's study with mothers of children with Fragile X,

Several mothers remembered others telling them that God gives special children to special parents. This message was not always well received. Amber recalled that when people would say this to her husband, "He'd just want to smack them because he was so angry. And I got kind of tired of hearing it, too". (p. 9)

In a study of Canadian Christian caregiving parents of children with various disabilities, Laura MacGregor (2021) spoke with parents who were told that their son's disability was a result of their sin, and parents who "perceived that God had an active role in their suffering and confusion" (p. 132). Parents encountered real times of abandonment and frustration in their faith.

Participation in religious communities, too, can lead to mixed outcomes. In these contexts, people with disabilities and their families can hear messages like those above—that the disability is a result of someone's sin—along with trite and insensitive phrases like "God will not give you more than you can handle." (MacGregor 2021, p. 133). Where faith communities can be a source of strength for families who find belonging and acceptance there, they can be difficult and frustrating when families feel that their children are not supported well or are not accepted (Ault et al. 2013; Boehm and Carter 2019; Ekas et al. 2019; Poston and Turnbull 2004). Religious beliefs, depending on how they are expressed, can be a barrier to full participation in spiritual communities for people with intellectual disabilities. "Religious communities can create barriers to integrating people with IDD due to the abstract nature and discourse of some beliefs" (Sango and Forrester-Jones 2018, p. 274).

Even negative or shameful attitudes or experiences regarding disability from a spiritual or religious perspective are *worth exploring* and *should be addressed* if a positive therapeutic outcome is the desired result. Without considering and addressing potentially negative or troubling spiritual realities, it can be difficult for families and people with intellectual disabilities to move beyond these stereotypes or spiritual stigma attached to disability. The second argument for addressing spirituality is *whether spirituality has an overall positive or negative impact* on someone's life; it is crucial that counselors, psychologists, religious leaders, and other supportive persons engage and explore these spiritual dimensions, even when—and perhaps, especially when—this might be difficult. "Spirituality" as a more general consideration than "religion" or "religious communities" can be an effective starting point for these families and people with disabilities themselves to share aspects of their lives that are meaningful to them, often encompassing religion or involvement in religious communities.

5. Expanding Spiritual Understanding through Embodied Attentiveness, the Arts, and Grief Intervention

5.1. A Barthian Approach to Embodied Attentiveness

In the "Embodied Encounter Through Imagination and the Arts: Toward a (Barthian) Theology and Praxis of Pastoral Care and Counseling for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities" (Demmons 2008), Tracy Demmons builds on Karl Barth's principles of "embodied encounter" to emphasize the need to "look each other in the eye" (p. 369). Taken literally, this cannot apply to everyone equally, such as those with vision impairments. It might mean, however, practically, "meeting people where they're at". If someone uses a wheelchair, getting to eye level for extended conversations is usually the considerate course of action. The fundamental point, however, is that mutual respect and equality

serve as a critical foundation for meaningful pastoral care and counseling, and this is no less true for people with intellectual disabilities. To borrow from Martin Buber in “I-Thou”, encounters between human beings (as opposed to “I-It” interactions) means little progress will be made without a reorientation to receive diverse ways of engaging with, and understanding, the spiritual, the sacred, the divine, and the significant. As Demmons notes (p. 365), typical ways of engaging in spiritual practice and care often exclude people with intellectual disabilities, due to the ways they privilege cognitive engagement with spiritual principles (c.f. Sango and Forrester-Jones 2018). Put differently, we may not offer full respect and worth to diverse ways of understanding and relating to the divine if we expect these interactions, beliefs, and perceptions to take place in the same way they do for any one of us. Speech-only methods of understanding and relating to spiritual experiences, and methods that rely on a high degree of cognition, may miss the mark for many with intellectual disabilities and those who experience the divine differently than in ways easily expressed in the context of a pastoral conversation or therapy session.

As a chaplain for and with people with intellectual disabilities, Demmons shares about the time she met a man with physical and intellectual disabilities with whom she could only interact through a plastic divider. In this case, the divider was transparent and he was able to meet and maintain eye contact. The two mirrored each other’s hand gestures in a kind of circular motion. A deep reciprocity was established based on shared movement as they made the same shapes and circles. The visits consisted of no words, but “the form of care . . . affirmed at a very basic level worth, value and esteem, while also recognizing our mutual humanity” (Demmons 2008, p. 370). Demmons’ approach has much in common with the *Intensive Interaction* method espoused by Phoebe Caldwell (2006). Intensive Interaction was inspired by the moment psychologist Gary Ephraim tried echoing back people’s behaviour to them and was surprised when people started paying attention based on this “mirroring”. Caldwell builds on Ephraim’s methods, emphasizing the connection and understanding that can take place when we “focus on what it is that has meaning for [the person] we are with and work through their language, the way they talk to themselves” (pp. 15–16).

Embodied encounters that explore spirituality demand close attention to posture, gestures, expressions, utterances, and physical attributes and engagement, even as they seek not to exclude based on any one of these factors. Barth’s emphasis on “mutual speech and hearing” (Demmons 2008, p. 370; c.f. Barth 1960, p. 252) will not apply equally to people with varied communication abilities, yet the principle demands close attention (or “quiet attentiveness” (Dow 2021)) to the ways and means by which people express themselves and are received. Demmons stresses that pastoral care (and, I would suggest, other forms of counseling and support) with people with intellectual disabilities must “be especially attentive to the signs, motions, and facial movements of the other, as well as intentionally and perhaps even deliberately mirroring the form of expression used by the other person” (p. 372). Where possible to communicate using verbal language, this embodied positionality might require follow-up questions such as “Can you hear me alright?/Am I speaking loud enough?/Are you able to see me clearly?” and so on (p. 371).

Barth’s writing that Demmons draws on uses anything but plain language. He considers speech as “reciprocal expression and its reciprocal reception, reciprocal address and its reciprocal reception”, to give one example (Demmons 2008, p. 371; c.f. Barth 1960, p. 253). At the root of his and Demmons’ insistence, though, is the practical simplicity of *being with* one another as spiritual questions are explored. How do we move? How do we understand? How do we reciprocate? How do we express what we think? How do we respond meaningfully? The activity of mirroring another, as conveyed in Demmons’ account, may be meaningful to someone. It may also be frustrating for them if it is overdone. At its core, at that moment, it reflected Demmons’ commitment to *paying attention*. It is by diversifying the modes and methods of communicating with people about what is sacred, significant, and meaningful to them that we open up paths to understanding spirituality itself in beautiful and variable ways.

Despite my difficulty recalling childhood memories and interactions, one event stands out in my mind. It takes place in a psychologist's room at the SickKids hospital in Toronto when I was nine or ten years old. The psychologist was talking with my parents about the possibility of my older sister dying due to her struggle with Anorexia Nervosa. Playing with Lego in the corner, I subconsciously began playing with the bricks louder and louder to drown out the psychologist's words and the possibility of my sister's death. Rather than letting this "be," the psychologist turned to me and asked if I was playing louder to avoid thinking about my sister dying. My first instinct was anger. How dare this stranger point out something so painful and call attention to my behaviour? What right did he have? I was embarrassed. Yet, in hindsight, the psychologist's attention to my behaviour also challenged me to face the depth of my anticipatory grief and the fear I experienced in that situation. I did not want to face this possibility. "Calling out" my action brought me reluctantly into the conversation and conveyed recognition of the depth of what I would call the *spiritual* anguish of what we were facing. I was having difficulty even beginning to comprehend that such a deep tie, a person who was a formational part of my life and identity, might soon be gone. Thankfully, my sister worked through this incident and the turbulent years that followed. She now speaks and writes candidly about her struggle with anorexia to encourage others on a similar path.

5.2. Art Engagement as Spiritual Practice

Demmons points to a broad understanding of the arts as avenues through which to explore spirituality from a supportive or therapeutic perspective. She shares the experience of a client who would roll balls of clay when she was feeling distressed or upset. This task would channel her client's energy and anxiety into the clay. Reflecting on this relationship and the role this artistic endeavor played in the life of her client, she observes,

Sight, speech, and hearing can be made possible for those with disabilities, made possible through other hermeneutics of communication such as found in the imagination and the arts; art may allow a non-verbal person to properly express herself, music may allow a visually impaired person '[to] see' another's personality and being in a song, and in turn be seen, and dance may allow a person who is nonverbal to express the joy and gladness that he or she may be experiencing. Words are merely one form of expression or one form of being; the arts, however, represent a multitudinous variety of options for engaging in encounter. (Demmons 2008, p. 372)

As a direct support professional, I used to support a gentleman who would sit on the floor and wind string around his finger as he developed tiny artistic creations. Pulling any loose string that he could find left him short on clothes, but this creative practice became a useful coping method for him. It was a way to channel frustration and work towards relaxation. In the moments when he practiced this activity, he became "at home" wherever he found himself. String-winding was a significant practice and ritual for him. It is easy for professionals to recognize string-winding as a coping strategy. Might it also be described as spiritual?

I am not sure this gentleman cared deeply about the way the string creation looked when it was finished, but he found meaning and calm in the practice itself. Those of us who knew him well would say that it helped him to *be at home*, both in his body and in his environment, and to make sense of his surroundings and his place in relation to them. This activity brought him peace and helped to centre him. If meditation is considered a spiritual practice, string-winding was no less so. Being with him and witnessing his ritual would often also bring a sense of calm and joy to those around him. While there was no indication that he considered it a communal practice, the centering calm that string-winding brought to those in the room had a wider effect beyond the individual.

Someone else I worked with would ask, using signs, for Christian worship music to be played and would commence walking in circles around his room, rocking as he walked and "dancing" with his hands in front of him—not signing, exactly, but expressing himself

to the music. This is someone who, at the time, required two-on-one support due to a risk of injury to himself and others. In those moments of peace, as he sought a calming space, he expressed himself in ritual and practice when words would not suffice. Again, paying attention to this embodied movement was a way to tune into his connection to the music, his body, and his space. To provide significance only to expressive language or verbalized beliefs in this space would have been to miss the moment and the meaning associated with this moment entirely.

5.3. *The Spirituality and Ritual of Grief and Loss*

The depth of grief and its significance in our lives—whether due to the passing of a loved one or any manner of losses throughout our lifecycle—confirms better than arguments that, experiences, other than those enmeshed in particular religious traditions, can and should be considered “spiritual”—noting, of course, that grief experiences often take place within certain religious understandings and traditions. Pinpoints of sacred light are most visible through the night of grief. Grief paints in sharp relief our significant loves and sacred meanings when our relationship to these realities change in painful ways. One resource I regularly refer support professionals to in times of grief is *Helping People with Developmental Disabilities Mourn: Practical Rituals for Caregivers* (Markell 2005). This guide walks through supporting people with varied approaches, almost none relying exclusively on the spoken word or intellectual cognition. Photographs, collaborative storytelling, memory objects, plants and trees, drawing, music, writing, stones, daily objects, memory, belongings, light, and even food and Play-Doh become mediums by which to explore grief and loss, death and dying. Just as the physicality and ritual of these activities help people to journey through the grief process, so can similar methodologies be engaged to understand spirituality, relationships, and meaning in a person’s life. Markell’s work echoes Tracy Demmons’ approach—not only to encompass grief and loss in a broad understanding of spirituality, but to reinforce that what is considered “art” is expansive and diverse—in this case, welcoming intentional ritual or non-ritual experiences with the physical world and any kind of object or storytelling practice as part of that artistic reflection.

Grief experiences, both death and non-death-related grief, are prevalent in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. Those who live in supported group living experience the transition or loss of hundreds of direct support professionals whom they may have formed meaningful relationships with. Many still process the grief and trauma of years spent in large institutional living environments. Housemates, family members, friends, and staff die with mixed responses and follow-up. Many family members, guardians, and still some direct support professionals, withhold information or prevent people with intellectual disabilities from fully participating in rituals and mourning practices that would help on this journey through grief. In this way, grief experiences—for better and worse—demonstrate the pivotal role of diverse responses and spiritual support through times of loss.

Jenelle Clarke’s research (Clarke 2017) on the significance of “everyday interaction rituals” within therapeutic communities demonstrates that social rituals such as mealtimes and grocery shopping together benefit community members, generating feelings of solidarity and belonging (p. 65). Clarke laments that “everyday encounters are not fully acknowledged, reflected upon and conceptualized as a component of therapy” (p. 64). These routine, accessible, and low-pressure practices help people to connect and feel a sense of competence and consistency in times when other aspects might be or seem out of control. I would suggest that an open posture is needed, even toward the *spirituality of grocery shopping*.

In our support locations at times early in the COVID-19 pandemic, when opportunities to leave home and interact with the community were severely restricted, a repeated refrain was people’s grief over not being able to go grocery shopping or to meet with friends in a local restaurant. In an uncertain world, where loss, restrictions, and even fear were prevalent experiences, these “outings” helped foster a sense of comradeship, belonging,

autonomy, contribution, and friendship amongst people facing some of the most severe governmental restrictions in Canadian society. If we are serious about expanding our search for spirituality based on the definition at the beginning of this article, having these deep needs met through times of exceptional grief and loss should be understood as necessary for spiritual flourishing.

6. Conclusions: Suggesting a Spirituality of Embodied Resonance

This article began with an evocative Kabbalah creation myth, depicting a world in which it is each of our responsibilities to seek out goodness and truth amongst the darkness, to find and restore the shards of divine light from the vessels that had shattered. The myth offers an apt metaphor for the ways we might seek to support the spiritual flourishing of people with intellectual disabilities. Whether one serves as a counselor, therapist, chaplain, faith leader, or direct support professional; offering therapeutic services or community services, we *must* be attuned to areas of significance in the life of the person who receives support. These ways that individuals seek and express meaning and purpose, their “connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred” (Puchalski et al. 2009, p. 887), are aspects of their spiritual orientation and exploration. Certainly, religion must be considered and may be a significant part of how people seek and express meaning and purpose. Yet, cognitive-centric emphases on religious beliefs and particular religious practices not only minimize the full range of embodied spiritual experiences; they can also prevent professional inquiry for fear of disagreement and discord.

It was then argued that in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, religion and spirituality *make a difference*. In most people’s lives, they have a positive impact on quality of life and coping strategies. Even when religion and spirituality have a negative impact, they are worth addressing from a therapeutic perspective because of their significance.

Finally, I suggested that a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the range of spiritual experiences in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities might be pursued through embodied attentiveness, the arts, consideration of grief supports, and the role of ritual. These avenues hold promise for bypassing hypercognitive biases and opening ourselves, as professionals, to the richly varied experiences of and expressions of spirituality for people with intellectual disabilities. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, my sincere belief is that these principles hold true, not only for people with intellectual disabilities but for all of us. We all live and breathe our spiritual centers in embodied, mysterious, and sometimes unfathomable ways.

As a way of pointing toward future possibilities and potential, I suggest a metaphor change from the sense of *sight* to the sense of *sound*. Beginning with *tikkun olam* as a way of looking for and drawing out glimmers of light in the world around us, this work also points to “attunement” as a way forward. Being *attuned* to the vibrant spiritual lives of people with intellectual disabilities invites a principle of harmony as we seek to “restore the world”. Hartmut Rosa, in *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (Rosa 2019) and later, in *The Uncontrollability of the World* (Rosa 2022) suggests that “resonance” is a helpful framing for finding meaning and significance in a world often marked by alienation and uncontrollability. Indeed, the very uncontrollability of the world, in some ways, makes significance and meaning possible. While Rosa does not define resonance as spirituality, its definition mirrors the rich, meaningful, purposeful, and satisfying connectedness with the world, one another, the sacred, and ourselves, found in our contemporary understanding of spirituality. Where, as Tony Lee (2015) suggests, Kabbalah carries spiritual principles that invite engagement and participation from across the religious spectrum, Rosa’s *resonance* has the potential for greater appeal and interest with those who do not adhere to any particular spiritual or religious tradition.

Regardless of the metaphors or terms that are employed, support professionals must go beyond rigid perceptions or expectations of spiritual experiences that miss the centrality,

vitality, and potential of therapeutic engagement of spirituality in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. This article suggests several ways forward.

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