



What is Spirituality?

What do we mean when we talk about spirituality and spiritual fitness? In fact, at its core, spirituality is about **connection**, including connection with humans and with a deity or divine presence¹. It is also about **meaning**: asking what matters, what is meaningful and important in life. For a lot of people, being spiritual is part of being religious. Others may be spiritual without any religious affiliation. Some of the main things that people describe when they talk about the meaning of spirituality are:

- Life's meaning and significance
- Values, beliefs and ethics
- Transcendent experiences and awareness of life beyond oneself
- Connection with self, others, God, and life
- Reflecting on life, and a sense of "deep self" or soul



What is Spiritual Fitness?

Spiritual fitness means different things to different people. For most people, it means having a spiritual life, or a set of beliefs and values that guide them and give their life meaning. People who are spiritually fit, who are living with a **purpose** and in **connection** with the world around them, tend to have a stronger self-esteem, better coping skills, and more solid relationships. Spiritual fitness can also bond people through love, forgiveness and compassion.

Just like keeping physically fit, spiritual fitness is something that needs to be tended to and worked at. For some, the path to spiritual fitness is through organized religion, whereas the practice of some others is not tied to any religious belief. You might find meaning and connection by spending time in nature, or through volunteering, or by creating something useful, or even by playing with a pet.



Why is Spiritual Fitness Important?

Spiritual fitness matters because the more that people feel connected to a sense of meaning in their lives to others, and to the divine, the more they are able to cope successfully and bounce back in times of stress and crisis.. And there is evidence to support these claims! Studies have found that veterans who find satisfaction and purpose in their lives and have an active spiritual practice report fewer and less severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Those who have a hard time reconciling their faith with their war experiences or who felt alienated from God or a higher power tend to have more, or more severe, PTSD symptoms. Spiritual coping is related to better health among people who are ill, and to less loneliness and depression and greater satisfaction with life after a stressful experience.

¹Black, G.L. *Spirituality and Religion*. Copyright 2007. Hooah for Health: Spirit. <http://www.hooah4health.com/spirit/religion.htm>. Viewed 14 July 2007.