

## The Soul of the Helper Advance Praise

“This book joins insights from mental health research, contemplative theology, and Dr. Oxhandler’s own spiritual journey to guide helpers in transformational healing and growth. Dr. Oxhandler’s presentation of Namaste Theory nurtures awareness of the Sacred within ourselves and those we help in a wise, heartfelt, humble, and skillful way. She extends her deep faith to embrace the diversity of everyone’s spiritual paths. As a result, her approach joins head with heart and contemplation with active service while honoring the Sacred in all.”

—**Edward R. Canda**, PhD, professor emeritus and coordinator of the Spiritual Diversity and Social Work Initiative at The University of Kansas, and author of *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice*

“*The Soul of the Helper* is a deep exhale and a warm embrace for all who care for others but too easily forget to care for themselves. Dr. Oxhandler’s expansive, approachable work will shine a guiding light into your heart, mind, body, and soul—helping you release what is not yours to hold so that you might be more awake to the belovedness that radiates within you and around you.”

—**Kayla Craig**, author of *To Light Their Way*

“The true gift of Dr. Oxhandler’s writing is that she engages her own curiosity and tenderly shares helpful tools to make our inner worlds and the world around us spiritually healthier. In this book, she helps the helpers by reminding us that our care matters and that the world is a better place when we meet those needs alongside recognizing the Divine in everyone. Please buy

this book and give yourself the space to read and actively embody its practices—you will be so glad you did.”

—**Kaitlin Curtice**, essayist, poet, and award-winning author of *Native*

“In *The Soul of the Helper*, Holly Oxhandler gently reminds us that soul-work is an essential component of health, healing, and helping. A timely and much-needed read; spot on, brilliantly unpacked, and beautifully written.”

—**Rev. Courtney Ellis**, PCUSA, pastor, and author of *Uncluttered*

“It takes a special type of person to run into the difficult situations of others. These helpers rarely see what they do as valiant or sacrificial. They are simply acting from a place of authentic desire to serve others. In *The Soul of the Helper*, Dr. Holly Oxhandler reminds them of the importance of tending to their own inner spiritual and mental landscape. Holly guides the reader through a transformational seven stage journey to seeing the Sacred, through a combination of research, personal stories, and reflection questions. *The Soul of the Helper* provides a needed framework to help those within various service professions preserve their own wellbeing as they serve others.”

—**Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith**, physician, and author of *Sacred Rest*

“Through years of academic research combined with much inner work, Dr. Holly Oxhandler offers us helpers Namaste Theory—seeing the divine spark in ourselves, and thus, in turn,

being able to better observe it in others. Only in embracing our belovedness, our enoughness, God’s love for us, can we identify God’s image in others, their belovedness, and thus serve them well. Not only is the theory brilliant, but Oxhandler peels it back like an onion, layer by layer, teaching us how to see and embrace our belovedness. Only then can we offer others the belovedness we observe in them, back to them—the greatest of gifts! Herein we find Oxhandler an able, wise, and humble guide. It is hard to give to others what we do not have; may we learn from her how to receive it.”

—**Marlena Graves**, author of *The Way Up Is Down*

“In this groundbreaking, ovarial work, Dr. Oxhandler makes ancient contemplative wisdom easily accessible and applicable to the helping professions. The field of social work and mental health will be forever enriched by Oxhandler’s sound research and application of her Namaste Theory. This is a must-read not only for those in a helping career but for anyone interested in being of service to others. Thank you, Oxhandler, for living this work with your life.”

—**Phileena Heuertz**, founding partner, Gravity, a Center for Contemplative Activism, and author of *Mindful Silence* and *Pilgrimage of a Soul*

“As researcher, Holly Oxhandler has shown that people want to talk about spirituality in psychotherapy and that mental health practitioners attuned to their own spirituality are more likely to attune to the spirituality of their clients. In *The Soul of the Helper*, Oxhandler becomes spiritual guide. In language rich with warmth, clarity, and humanness, she describes practical

strategies to help caregivers nourish their own spiritual selves. *The Soul of the Helper* is soul food for helpers.”

—**Russell Siler Jones**, ThD, LPCS, author of *Spirit in Session*, and developer of ACPE’s Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy Program

“In these days of overwhelm and trauma, *The Soul of the Helper* is a vital resource to support folks in their own healing, and ultimately in becoming a healing presence in the world.

Dr. Holly Oxhandler has lovingly woven together threads of spirituality, mental health, and the inherent divine spark we each carry. I’m immensely grateful for Dr. Oxhandler’s book; it’s something I will return to again and again.”

—**Aundi Kolber**, MA, LPC, therapist, and author of *Try Softer* and *The Try Softer Guided Journey*

“*The Soul of the Helper* is far more than a self-help book for helpers. Grounded in research yet deeply personal and profoundly practical, it’s a radical invitation into greater wholeness. Whether our helping role is personal or professional, accidental or a vocational calling, this book is a guide that illuminates with clarity both the pitfalls of ignoring our limits and the promises of turning toward the Sacred within each of us.”

—**Ryan Kuja**, licensed therapist, spiritual director, and author of *From the Inside Out*

“In *The Soul of the Helper*, Dr. Holly Oxhandler offers a fresh perspective on the complex intersection of spirituality and mental health, weaving in research and gently guiding readers to reflect upon their own spiritual and mental health journeys.

Written from a background in mental health and a place of humility and respect for diverse faith traditions, Holly invites fellow helpers to wake up to the divine spark within themselves and remember their identity as Beloved. This book is a vital and brilliant guide for each of us navigating the spiritual and mental health journey as we serve others.”

—**Melody Moezzi**, author of *The Rumi Prescription*

“This is a book first and foremost about the spirituality of the helper. How can helpers care for others, Holly Oxhandler asks, without attending to their own souls? With wisdom, compassion, patience, and the courage to share her personal story, Oxhandler teaches helpers to see themselves and others through a sacred lens. *The Soul of the Helper* is an invaluable, indeed essential, book for helpers, regardless of their orientation to religion and spirituality, interested in weaving spirituality more fully into the ways they care for others and themselves.”

—**Kenneth I. Pargament**, PhD, professor emeritus of psychology, Bowling Green State University, and author of *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy*

“Like many other ‘helpers,’ I’ve often been haunted by a need to work harder, do more, and serve better that’s led to weariness and burnout. In *The Soul of the Helper*, Dr. Holly Oxhandler upends the lie that we can love others well if we don’t truly love ourselves. With tender vulnerability and simple practices we can all implement, Dr. Oxhandler gently leads us toward a life grounded in our belovedness. If you want to love others well but want to do it from a place of rest, health, and wholeness, this poignant and timely book is for you.”

—**Sarah J. Robinson**, author of *I Love Jesus, But I Want to Die*

“*The Soul of the Helper* is a timely reminder to all healthcare practitioners that taking care of others necessitates taking care of ourselves, and receiving care from others. Oxhandler masterfully interweaves her personal experiences, clinical anecdotes, and the latest research on spirituality and mental health to illustrate how a spiritual worldview can engender greater recognition of our inner greatness and that of our patients.”

—**David H. Rosmarin**, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, director of the Spirituality and Mental Health Program at McLean Hospital, and author of *The Connections Paradigm*

“It’s truly the vulnerability for me. Dr. Oxhandler’s truth in the words of *The Soul of the Helper* is inspiring and breathtaking. It reads as if I’m having my own personal conversation with her in my living room. The reflection exercises are profound and yet still easily applicable to the everyday experience of a helper. One will truly connect or re-connect with the Sacred within them after reading this book.”

—**Dr. Amber Thornton**, clinical psychologist, and motherhood wellness consultant

“Well-researched and incredibly written, *The Soul of The Helper* is an outstanding resource. Dr. Oxhandler blends her own story with practical ideas that are important for anyone that calls themselves a helper, regardless of the context.”

—**Robert Vore**, therapist, and host of *CXMH: A Podcast on Faith & Mental Health*

# THE SOUL OF THE HELPER





THE  
**SOUL**  
OF THE  
**HELPER**

Seven Stages to Seeing  
the Sacred Within Yourself  
So You Can See It in Others

HOLLY K. OXHANDLER, PHD, LMSW



TEMPLETON PRESS

TEMPLETON PRESS  
300 Conshohocken State Road, Suite 500  
West Conshohocken, PA 19428  
www.templetonpress.org

© 2022 by Holly K. Oxhandler

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

Set in Minion Pro and Proxima Nova by Westchester Publishing Services.

This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992  
(Permanence of Paper).

ISBN: 978-1-59947-591-2 (cloth)

ISBN: 978-1-59947-592-9 (ebook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021945297

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Printed in the United States of America.

22 23 24 25 26      10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Callie and Oliver

*May you always seek the light within you throughout  
your journey, which I'm so grateful and honored  
to get to walk alongside. Thank you for teaching me  
to be present, to heal, and to play.*

To Cory

*May you always know how much you mean  
to me and how grateful I am for you.  
Thank you for teaching me to slow down, for  
loving me as I am, and for always believing in me.*



# CONTENTS

Author's Note . . . . .	ix
Intention . . . . .	xi
Introduction . . . . .	3

## **PART I Spirituality and Mental Health: Two Key Considerations for Seeking the Sacred Within**

1 Considering the Spiritual Journey . . . . .	15
2 Considering the Mental Health Journey . . . . .	25
3 Namaste Theory for Helpers . . . . .	37

## **PART II The Journey of Seeking the Sacred: Finding the Sacred Within Ourselves to See It in Others**

4 Speed . . . . .	49
5 Slow . . . . .	65
6 Steady . . . . .	79
7 Still . . . . .	99
8 See . . . . .	117
9 Shift . . . . .	137
10 Serve . . . . .	155

**PART III “So What?”: Cultivating a Practice of Seeking  
and Serving the Sacred for the Journey Ahead**

<b>11</b>	Seek and Serve the Sacred . . . . .	173
	Notes. . . . .	185
	Resources. . . . .	209
	Gratitude. . . . .	213
	About the Author. . . . .	221

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book includes content on the intersection of spirituality and mental health. It is written from the perspective of a social work researcher who studies and has personally navigated this intersection. It is also generally written using a qualitative research method called autoethnography. This approach involves being reflexive and weaving in elements of my personal story alongside the research to better understand the data and experiences of someone navigating this intersection.

More specifically, I consider myself to be a helper, particularly as a parent, partner, educator, researcher, social worker, administrator, loved one, and fellow human being who deeply values and finds meaning in serving others. My graduate training in social work focused on mental health, and I have personally navigated anxiety and depression. My faith background is in Catholicism and Protestant Christianity, with some interfaith experiences described in the book. To be clear, I am not writing this book as a religious scholar or faith leader. Any mention of other religious traditions, cultures, or philosophies are to the best of my understanding and with a wholehearted posture of humility and respect. While elements of my mental health and spiritual journey may resonate with you as a fellow traveler, it is simply *one* journey and I encourage you to lean into your own unique spiritual and mental health journey.

Throughout this book, you'll find resources that might help you navigate your own mental health and spiritual journey. As a fellow traveler who has navigated this complex intersection in my own life, let me assure you—books can be helpful along the journey but cannot replace the hard work of seeing a trained mental health care provider or spiritual director (or both).

If you or someone you love is facing mental health or spiritual struggles, help is available. You are so worth caring for and tending to the gift of your life, and my wholehearted hope is that after reading this book, you will see and know it for yourself.



# INTENTION

Dear fellow helper,

I have a hunch that along your journey you've been taught to help others and to do and go and alleviate and advocate and heal and serve. If you're reading this book, you likely consider yourself a helper in some capacity. Maybe you're a parent, therapist, teacher, barista, doctor, or faith leader. Maybe you're a social worker, lawyer, caregiver, community volunteer, or public servant. No matter your role, you are a complex being. You have physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs, all of which are worth tending to the best of your ability.

In this book, I'll be asking you to consider the roles of faith and mental health in your own life. I promise to explain this more in the chapters ahead and why this is so important, but for now, know this: I'm writing this book with you in my mind, heart, and being. I'm picturing you, imagining your face, the way you smile, and the way you share your gifts with your community. I imagine your heart's heaviness from practicing empathy each day, your incredible resilience, and the unique and complex faith and mental health journeys you navigate, even as you serve the world around you.

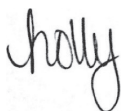
The way you care for others is holy, sacred work. You bring healing to so many in the good work you do. Regardless of whether you see it, you are birthing beauty, love, goodness, and wholeness

into the world. As a fellow human being, parent, teacher, loved one, and helper—thank you.

In the pages ahead, I hope to honor you and the ways you care for others. At the same time, know that I deeply care for you just as you are, aside from anything you do. Why? Because you bear the image of divinity. You are beloved exactly as you are, and that alone makes you worthy of honor and dignity.

That's why I intend to serve you in this book with the hope that in the pages ahead you will not only see the image of God in yourself, but you will see it in those you serve. Even more, it's my hope that you will learn to better serve the Sacred in yourself and others, nurturing the divine spark that is in you.

Kindly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "holly". The letters are connected and fluid, with a prominent loop at the end of the word.

# THE SOUL OF THE HELPER



## INTRODUCTION

*I don't belong here*, I thought, as the resident students in their white coats filled up the front seats of the auditorium. Pairs of middle-aged men—psychiatrists, psychologists, and physicians—engaged in small talk in the aisles. I couldn't hear their conversations, but I assumed they were discussing topics well beyond my comprehension. I hid in a back corner, rows away from anyone. I was only twenty-three and months away from beginning a master's degree in social work. I was out of my league.

Dr. Kenneth Pargament, a psychology professor and well-known researcher on religious coping, was visiting the Texas Medical Center to give a presentation entitled *God Help Me: Addressing Religious Resources and Spiritual Struggles in the Context of Health Care*. At the time, I was working as a research assistant on a study examining how older adults in therapy for anxiety and depression viewed the role of religion or spirituality in their treatment. Having heard these patients' stories and navigated my own life circumstances through both faith and therapy, I suspected Dr. Pargament's work would resonate.

He began by presenting data on how patients use faith to cope with difficulties. Through his research, he demonstrated how religion and spirituality were inextricably tied to mental health.<sup>1</sup> And then he shared a startling statistic I've never forgotten: nearly 90 percent of U.S. adults believe in God, but about a third of psychologists believe in a personal God, and very few psychology

programs include attention to the role of religion or spirituality in practice.<sup>2</sup>

*But these are helpers, people trained to serve others*, I thought. And with so many who believe in God and use that belief to cope with the stresses of life, shouldn't these therapists be trained to help their clients bridge the gap between their mental health and their faith?

Sitting in the back corner of the auditorium, my stomach, heart, and jaw all dropped at the same time. Every cell in my body hummed with curiosity. As I scribbled some notes, my thoughts shifted to the profession I'd soon be studying. Without thinking, I wrote, *What about social work?*, wondering if the same gap existed in that field. Were social workers trained to consider the spiritual beliefs and needs of those they helped? I circled the question over and over in a state of meditation, surrender, and deep curiosity. Time stood still, and it was as though gravity was anchoring me to that question.

Over the months that followed, that question that hit me like a lightning bolt—*What about social work?*—kept nagging at me. It wouldn't let me go. It never has. That question and my deep curiosity surrounding it set the stage for what has become my life's work.

More specifically, for the last thirteen years, I've contemplated how mental health professionals can ethically and effectively integrate clients' religion and spirituality into treatments meant to help people. I've read the work of other scholars asking similar questions in social work and related disciplines. I've developed my own research studies on the topic, gathered the data, and written about my findings in peer-reviewed academic journals.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, I've realized this isn't just a question for mental health care providers or social workers to consider but for everyday helpers. That's what I want to share with you in this book. But first, you might be won-

dering how I ended up in that auditorium in the first place. It's a great question, one that begins in my childhood.

## **Early Seeds: My Journey into the Soul of a Helper**

I was only ten when my parents began a long, messy divorce that included a painfully complex custody battle. Even after being finalized, years of residual heartache and trauma continued. Through all of it, I navigated a turbulent relationship with my biological father that included moments of joy but also fear, abuse, and rejection. Fortunately, even in the 1990s, my mother understood the importance of therapy during this season of transition, trauma, and grief.

Throughout those years, many therapists heard my story—Rosie, Peter, Estalyn, Alexia, Angela—and I'm grateful for the safety and care each provided. In their offices, I felt safe to set down my mask, quit pretending I was "okay" to comfort others, and invite them into my heavy interior world.

Growing up Catholic, faith was always important to me. I attended Catholic schools, went to church every Sunday, and participated in or received the age-appropriate sacraments. But faithful as I appeared, I was also wrestling with and deconstructing my faith, even at a young age. None of my friends had divorced parents, and I didn't talk about my home situation because our school and church didn't make space for divorce. For example, one day in fourth grade, with my overnight bag tucked in the classroom corner because of my parents' joint-custody schedule, my religion teacher shared her understanding of the Church's position on divorce with the class. "If you get a divorce, you're going to hell," she said, and all eyes turned to me. As the swell of shame and confusion set in, I ran across the room, curled up against the doorframe,

and cried hot tears. It was the beginning of my long process of questioning my faith. Even more, it was the first time I sensed that not all helpers—which includes teachers—are always helpful.

When combined with the shame I felt at school, the trauma and abuse I experienced from my biological father complicated my relationship with God. I lived in constant fear that I'd disappointed God by breaking the fifth commandment: "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12, KJV). After all, how could I honor my biological father who was actively hurting me? And why would God allow this kind of abuse and rejection to happen in my life? Struggling through these questions, I wondered, *Am I enough as I am for God's love?*

I went to confession seeking forgiveness, but I struggled to connect with a heavenly Father because my relationship with my biological father was so fractured. More than one priest was speechless as I shared about my home life, sobbing in fear that God would reject me just like my father had. And oh, how my father had rejected me. In one court-filed custody document, he'd described our relationship as meaningless.

But where my priests were speechless, my childhood therapists offered hope and healing. They were comfortable asking about my shame, anxiety, and grief. Some asked about my faith and infused it into treatment. For example, Peter spoke with me about meaning, purpose, God, and the role of faith in navigating my suffering—not to bypass my suffering but to hold space for all I was carrying. He had Indigenous imagery and sacred objects throughout his office, which opened my heart to a more expansive spirituality, and I later discovered he was a student of Fr. Richard Rohr's Living School.<sup>4</sup> Another therapist had Buddhist and Hindu symbols around her office, further exposing me to the mystery of diverse world religions as I sought support, and like Peter, she helped me connect with my faith on the journey toward healing. And as my



interests in the intersection of faith and mental health grew during college, yet another therapist shared stories of liminal spaces and sacred moments when time stood still with her clients.<sup>5</sup>

While some of my therapists were comfortable discussing spirituality, others were not. When I shared the importance of my faith, one replied, “Um, hmm, okay . . . but we won’t be talking about *that* in here.” Prickles of shame crept up, and in later sessions I always hesitated before mentioning my faith.

Years later, as I consider what my academic research has taught me, I’m not surprised by my therapists’ varying degrees of comfort. Peter was by far the most comfortable and curious. He never pushed a religious belief or agenda. Instead, he remained deeply grounded in what he believed, which allowed me the space I needed to explore my own faith, particularly as it related to my mental health and family situations. I wholly trusted Peter’s groundedness. In fact, it informs my work today.

I wish we each had someone like Peter in our lives, but more importantly, I wish we could be like Peter for others, even if we’re not all therapists. Why? Because we cannot separate our mental health from our spiritual journeys.

## **Early Seeds: My Journey into the Social Work Profession**

My experiences as a child led me to want to care for others. So, after receiving my bachelor’s degree in psychology, I was connected with a research team at Baylor College of Medicine that was studying a therapy manual for older adults with anxiety and depression.<sup>6</sup>

For a year, I offered eight-week sessions to these older adults and was trained in cognitive behavioral therapy. I also had an opportunity to work on the team’s adjacent research study, interviewing older adults regarding if they wanted to discuss their

religion and spirituality in mental health treatment. I fell in love with this second study. As one who'd had such mixed experiences with the confluence of faith and therapy, I was curious how older and wiser patients might navigate it.

Over the course of that study, we found that four out of five older adults wanted to discuss faith as it related to their mental health.<sup>7</sup> Over half said a therapist should bring up religion and spirituality during therapy, while a slim 17 percent said the client should bring the topic up. (Others said either could bring it up.) Why did most older adults want to include their faith within their mental health treatment? More, why had I heard "we don't talk about spirituality" in some of my training and from my own therapist?

I hadn't answered these questions when I left the team in 2009 to begin my master's degree in social work at the University of Houston, and they kept nagging at me. As my new colleagues and I sat in that auditorium those first few days, the faculty presented basic social work content to orient us. We were taught to think about our future clients holistically, as biopsychosocial individuals whose physical health, mental health, and social support are interconnected. We learned the phrase "person-in-environment," which captures how our environment and surrounding people, policies, structures, and systems influence us. We discussed ethics, coping, communities, resilience, trauma, and diverse layers of intersectionality.

What was the one thing we really didn't hear about during orientation? The role of religion, spirituality, or faith in social work. It was curious, especially because each presented topic was connected to religion and spirituality. It was also unsettling after working on the study a few months prior and hearing how many older adults wanted to talk about their spirituality in treatment, preferring that the therapist bring it up. With social work provid-

ing the largest proportion of mental health care in the United States, wouldn't these topics matter in our profession?<sup>8</sup>

As the semester continued, I pressed into my curiosity and found few researchers were studying spirituality and social work, leaving many gaps in understanding. In fact, across mental health fields, researchers studying this topic were few and far between. And though I began my master's training with the intention of having a private practice, I kept returning to Dr. Pargament's lecture and that question I scribbled down. I considered the studies I was reading that pointed to a lack of training on spirituality in social work and related professions. So, midway into my graduate training, I charted a new path toward a PhD, studying the integration of spirituality in social work practice.<sup>9</sup> I knew it was the right move. I'd fallen in love with a topic I couldn't *not* study.

## The Why Behind This Book

After studying the connection between faith and mental health for over a decade, this research has humbled and transformed me. It's taught me an important lesson: we all hold sacred beliefs and lived experiences, and those beliefs and experiences are important to consider in mental health care treatment. In fact, those beliefs and experiences are important to consider in any work of service. What's more, if we—the helpers—aren't paying attention to our own spiritual and mental health journeys, we run the risk of unintentionally hurting those we're trying to care for. It may lead us to say things like what one of my therapists said to me—we won't be talking about that (i.e., spirituality) here.

As I'll explain in this book, our work as helpers is most grounded when we see and serve the Sacred within both ourselves and those we're helping. The concept of seeing the Sacred in ourselves and others can be captured in a Sanskrit word, *Namaste*,

which comes from the words *namah* meaning “to bow or bend” and *te* meaning “to you.”<sup>10</sup> *Namaste* is commonly translated as “the Sacred in me honors the Sacred in you,” or “the God in me recognizes the God in you,” and it is often spoken as a greeting with folded hands and a bow.<sup>11</sup>

In 2017, I developed a grounded theory based on this research with mental health care providers that I called *Namaste Theory*.<sup>12</sup> As I’ve thought more about this theory, contemplated it within my own life, and been in conversation with other helpers, I’ve realized it’s a theory meant to help “helpers”—anyone who cares for another human being—recognize the Sacred within themselves. Why? Because my research showed that when helpers see and serve the Sacred within themselves, they are more likely to see and serve the Sacred within those they care for.

Transparently, I worked for years without seeing and serving the Sacred in myself. I had bought the lie that even if I wasn’t caring for myself holistically, I was still capable of caring for others (hello, pride). I thought I could push past my own exhaustion and continue helping. But as you’ll see, this was not the case. The fact is, when our well becomes empty, we fall into exhaustion, resentment, and burnout in our efforts to help others. As helpers, we need to find a way to keep our wells full.

## **An Overview of the Book**

Parents, partners, friends, colleagues, therapists, teachers, faith leaders, spiritual directors, administrators, leaders, engineers, waiters, medical doctors, nurses, office managers, social workers, politicians, authors, researchers, baristas, retail employees, first responders, artists, performers, custodial staff, lawyers, caregivers—nearly everyone has the capacity to be a helper. But some of the most helpful helpers operate from a place of holistic health, including humbly

integrating spirituality with their mental health journey. What's more, they recognize spirituality can be a central element to their lives and the lives of others. In the pages ahead, I'll share how Namaste Theory—recognizing the Sacred within ourselves and others—can help you live into that kind of framework.

In Part I, I'll demonstrate the importance of viewing mental health on a spectrum. I'll discuss the complexity of religion and spirituality and their connection with mental health. Then I'll introduce Namaste Theory and the research behind it, and conclude with a call for helpers to practice self-awareness as we serve.

Part II will cover the journey of seeking the Sacred, first within yourself, then in others. Each chapter—Speed, Slow, Steady, Still, See, Shift, Serve—outlines a step we must take on our journey toward seeing the Sacred in ourselves and others. Each chapter also includes relevant practices to help us connect with and serve the Sacred within the core of our being and within those around us.

The book concludes with the question I ask at the end of every class: “So what?” Considering Namaste Theory and this seven-stage journey, I'll invite you to reflect on why it matters to you and how it relates to the ways you support others.

My wholehearted hope is that these chapters help you reawaken to your inherent worth and help you see the Sacred within yourself, and that by doing so, you'll see it in others. I hope you'll trust me as a humble guide—not as someone who has perfected this process but as a fellow traveler on this lifelong journey of seeking the Sacred.