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## The Promise of Spirituality in Mediation: The Significance of Spiritual-Based and Faith-Based Approaches in Mediation

Debra Jones

Utah State University, debjones@comcast.net

Alexia Georgakopoulos

Nova Southeastern University, georgako@nova.edu

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## The Promise of Spirituality in Mediation: The Significance of Spiritual-Based and Faith-Based Approaches in Mediation

### Abstract

This article advocates greater exploration and incorporation of spirituality or religion in the mediation process. As religious or spiritual values constitute an element of one's culture, which inevitably forms a lens through which one interprets the world, the authors suggest a greater acceptance of exploring and acknowledging the power of addressing one's own religious or spiritual makeup. The authors present an agenda for mediation research and practice for the twenty-first century and consider several examples to encourage model development. In particular, the following discussion presents potentially valuable elements for an alternative approach to mediation which incorporates either religion or spirituality.

**Keywords:** *conflict resolution, mediation process, religion, spirituality*

### Author Bio(s)

Debra Jones is an Associate Professor and Youth Development Specialist at Utah State University. She holds a Ph.D. in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from Nova Southeastern University and is currently studying the role of spirituality in youth development. Email: [debjones@comcast.net](mailto:debjones@comcast.net)

Alexia Georgakopoulos is an Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution and Communication at Nova Southeastern University's Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS). She earned a Ph.D. from the Arizona State University. She is a co-facilitator for the Quality Enhancement Plan for institutional effectiveness and program accreditation at SHSS. Email: [georgako@nova.edu](mailto:georgako@nova.edu)

**THE PROMISE OF SPIRITUALITY IN MEDIATION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
SPIRITUAL-BASED AND FAITH-BASED APPROACHES IN MEDIATION**

**Debra Jones and Alexia Georgakopoulos**

**Abstract**

*This article advocates greater exploration and incorporation of spirituality or religion in the mediation process. As religious or spiritual values constitute an element of one's culture, which inevitably forms a lens through which one interprets the world, the authors suggest a greater acceptance of exploring and acknowledging the power of addressing one's own religious or spiritual makeup. The authors present an agenda for mediation research and practice for the twenty-first century and consider several examples to encourage model development. In particular, the following discussion presents potentially valuable elements for an alternative approach to mediation which incorporates either religion or spirituality.*

**Introduction**

The more vantage points we use to understand conflict, the more complete our understanding will be about its complex nature. Conflict resolution professionals are faced with the incredible challenge of assisting people from diverse populations and types of conflict. With the complexity of conflict comes our task, as conflict resolution specialists, to determine what types of approach best meet people's needs during conflict. No single model is sufficient or superior in conflict resolution. Today, alternative conflict resolution specialists are delivering their services in a consumer society where a variety of options are necessary in order to meet people's needs. Therefore, an important task for conflict resolution specialists is to discover what types of approach can enhance the practitioner's ability to successfully work with her/his unique clients; the goal should be to enhance the practitioner's toolbox. Contemporary scholars in the field should strive to find the most appropriate match between the conflict, the resolution approach, and the people involved. If an approach has utility, it will have an audience and it will promote positive change. The "audience" refers to individuals who are interested in learning and using the approach, and "positive change" refers to the positive outcomes that ensue as a result of the approach.

*Attention to Religion and Spirituality in Conflict Resolution*

Expectations are essential, normative requirements in social interaction (Burgoon, 1993). Given that people rely on expectations when they communicate with others, it seems intuitive that religious and spiritual expectations can influence how people cope with conflict. Clearly, religion and spirituality can be important components of culture. Thomas

(2005, p. 27) argued that “religion is as much a part of human life as any other aspect of society or culture”. Furthermore, Bellah (1965, p. 173) defined religion “as a cultural gyroscope ... [that provides] a stable set of definitions of the world [and] of the self”. According to Malraux (2003, p. 12), religion “is used as the legitimation for all aspects of life”, therefore, “it is often necessary to address a conflict’s religious aspects in order to move toward a just and peaceful settlement consistent with each side’s religious imperatives.” While religion and spirituality are to some extent related, there are differences, which we will discuss below. We include both in this paper because they are frequently used as interchangeable terms – a significant limitation in past research, as is the fact that neither is formally included in existing mediation models.

A common dimension of religion and spirituality is that they can guide human conduct, especially during challenging times such as conflict. In most societies, religion and religious behaviors have been observed. Thomas (2005) suggested that 77% of the world’s population follow a primary world religion. On the domestic front, recent polls in the U.S. indicated that approximately 90% of Americans claim to believe in God and pray at least once a week (Heclo, 2003). A poll released by *Newsweek* (2005) revealed 79% describe themselves as spiritual, 64% as religious, almost two-thirds pray every day, and almost one-third meditate.

Religion and spirituality appear to be integral to human existence and welfare universally. Narayanasamy (1999, p. 279) presents studies indicating that spirituality is natural to humans and has evolved “because it has biological survival value.” As individuals surviving today, we are products of our ancestors who have been successful in the past. The widespread expression of religion and spirituality may be an indication of the survival value these elements have had for humans.

### **Growth of Spirituality or Religion in Mediation**

The mind and spirit in Western Society have been largely perceived as separate entities from matter from the seventeenth century onward, whereby spiritual and religious concepts were placed in an inferior position to science since it was impossible to test the intangible (Fisher, 1994). Beliefs, along with the spirit, were not scientifically verifiable, thus, they were not honored. Rather, faith was placed with science and scientific inquiry. Clearly, the scientific paradigm has been a dominant tradition in Western Society, which has prevented religious and spiritual concepts from being fused with science. Yet in current times a *shift* towards religion and spirituality has emerged, even to a certain extent in the scientific community (Fisher, 1994; Thomas, 2005). By way of explanation, Fisher (1994, p. 12) suggested that: “all religions help to uncover meaningfulness in the midst of the mundane. They do so by exploring the transpersonal dimension of life—the eternal and infinite, beyond limited personal or communal concerns”. It is clear that science does not fulfill many of our human needs. This can be evidenced when religious attitudes and behaviors heighten during times of crisis such as war, natural disaster, and tragedy. Thomas (2005, p. 26) refers to heightened religious attitudes as:

the global resurgence of religion ... The growing saliency and persuasiveness of religion, i.e. the increasing importance of religious beliefs, practices, and discourses

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in personal and public life, and the growing role of religious or religiously-related individuals, non-state groups, political parties, and communities, and organizations in domestic politics, and this is occurring in ways that have significant implications for international politics.

The global resurgence of religion provides evidence against the long-held social science argument that with modernity there would be little need for “a gradual, persistent, unbroken erosion of religious influence” (Shupe, 1990, p. 19). If we consider that conflict can be a crisis, religion and spirituality may be beneficial to those who need comfort and assistance during such times.

Another important reason for the lack of religion or spirituality in U.S. mediation is that the practice of mediation in the U.S. has to a great extent been connected with the legal system (Lovenheim, 2002). Therefore, in accordance with the separation of church and state, there is little consideration of incorporating religion and spirituality in mediation or other types of conflict resolution approaches. Nevertheless, when humans engage in conflict, they largely draw upon their culture which may include religion or spirituality. Religion and spirituality may inform individuals as to what behaviors are appropriate during conflict. These behaviors are referred to as “display rules”. A read of most religious and spiritual texts clearly specify what display rules are encouraged and prized during conflict and what behaviors are discouraged during conflict. For example, do people operate on an “eye for an eye” basis or do they “turn the other cheek” during times of conflict? Religious-oriented approaches for conflict resolution encourage religious dialogue and interaction between parties. Despite the potential utility of integrating religion or spirituality in mediation, most mediation models found in the West do not directly include religion and spirituality in their framework. This is despite the fact that, as Thomas (2005, p. 27) reported, religion is “now a more observable part of people’s private and public lives, and so scholars, if often reluctantly, now acknowledge religion to be a global aspect of politics in the late twentieth century”.

Uncovering the value of a faith-based or spiritual-based mediation approach is a challenge that we attempt to address in this paper. Given the importance of religion and spirituality in conflict interaction, it is somewhat surprising that the majority of conflict resolution specialists do not incorporate faith-based or spiritual-based mediation in their approaches to conflicting parties. In addressing this challenge, we first begin by defining religion and spirituality and then we provide a rationale for the importance of religion and spirituality in mediation. We present an agenda for mediation research that underscores the value of faith-based or spiritual-based mediation for today’s complex conflicts in the domestic or international arenas. Throughout this paper, we present a case for the types of behaviors and interactions that could potentially be important to the success of a faith-based or spiritual-based approach in order to encourage more formal model development. As a point of comparison, we address the usefulness of incorporating religion and spirituality by reviewing a number of situations in which conflict resolution specialists have incorporated religion and spirituality.

In our discussion of incorporating religion or spirituality within the conflict resolution process, we do not advocate one belief system over another. What we do advocate is that one’s belief system, whatever that may be, serves as a guide in navigating the resolution or transformation of conflict. As careful exploration of religions will reveal,

there are more similarities than differences. It is within beliefs and values, which may be expressed in various ways under the guidance of a skilled or artful mediator, that shared meaning will be revealed.

### **Defining Religion and Spirituality**

Religion and spirituality are often used interchangeably. For the purposes of this paper, we recognize that religion and spirituality may indeed be one and the same for some individuals but quite different concepts according to others. We argue for the inclusion of whichever concept is important to the parties in conflict. For purposes of this paper, religion is defined as a formal structure aligned with one's adherence to beliefs and practices of a religious institution's theology and rituals (Zinnbauer *et al.*, 1997). It may further be defined as "a system of beliefs and practices that are relative to superhuman beings" (Smith and Green, 1995, p. 893).

Spirituality may be considered a broader concept which goes beyond the practice of a specific doctrine or faith. It may transcend one's involvement in organized religion, and focuses on personal experiences and one's connectedness to self, others, nature, the universe or a higher power. It is the awareness and sense of the interconnectedness of all things and can be experienced both within and/or outside of formal religious institutions (Goldberg, 1998; Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Vassallo, 2001; Walsh and Pryce, 2003; Zinnbauer *et al.*, 1997). We find the definition proposed by Elkins *et al.* (1988, p. 10) encompasses concepts of spirituality as suggested in conflict resolution literature. Elkins *et al.* suggest that spirituality is a human phenomenon, "a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers the Ultimate".

Emile Durkheim posited that every society is religious to some extent, and the U.S. is no exception. Leege (1993) goes so far as to say that religious beliefs and worldviews are the foundation of culture, with the consequential group socialization and ritual providing a foundation for individual and community action. He suggests that religious ritual allows one to interact with the sacred, which he believes to be at the center of community. Religion, whatever meaning it has for each individual, meets the function of culture through forming identity, behavioral norms, and the distinction of the other (Leege, 1993). Religious and spiritual teachings may facilitate a better understanding of how people might effectively approach the other during conflict – especially since these teachings are most often accompanied by written works.

Individuals may find a spiritual center within the doctrines of a specific religion or they may seek their own variety of spirituality in a blending of religious and non-religious beliefs and practices. Jung viewed religion not as belief in specific concepts or doctrines, but a *capacity to believe*, to find a spiritual element in life experiences which connects individuals to the larger collective (Christopher and Solomon, 2000). James (1902) seems to bridge institutional and personal concepts of religion. He suggests that personal religion comes from within and may not be expressed through adherence to institutional doctrine or

ritual. He defines as “religious”: “feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James, 1902, p. 32). We understand James to say that when the subconscious taps into the awareness of a higher power, the ultimate or the divine, one brings into consciousness, or physical reality of daily life, that which is experienced or felt during this communion. James (1902, p. 515) further states that “we can experience union with something larger than ourselves and in that union find our greatest peace”. Ochs (1983, pp. 8-9) further delineates this in her statement that, “religion in its true sense emphasizes the insight into our experiences and the consciousness that insists upon learning something from them”. She suggests that one’s work should be a way to give this insight to others as they develop their own relationship with life experiences. She discusses spirituality in terms of being able to forget oneself and to become caught up in other people’s stories, to respond from one’s heart, with compassion and understanding. This resonates with the role of the mediator.

### **Justification for Religion and Spirituality in Mediation**

The fact that there are a number of established conflict approaches and strategies does not make dealing with conflict a simple task. Rather, the key to conflict resolution is the suitability or match of the process/approach to the conflict and people involved. For people who are religious or spiritual, it would not be unexpected to find that Western conflict resolution strategies may have proven to be consistently ineffective. The assumption from the onset of this paper is that a suitable *fit* between people, the conflict, and the conflict resolution approach is necessary. While many religious or spiritual individuals may feel uncertainty regarding how to resolve or deal with conflict, they may have more confidence when they are guided by religious or spiritual principles since these concepts may be an integral product of years of socialization and learning.

Moules (2000) argues that our sense of faith in the sacred has been diminished and devalued, and the incorporation of sacred traditions of wisdom, compassion and kindness need to become integral parts of community. By giving parties the freedom to express spiritual or religious values, the path to uncovering the underlying issue(s) of conflict may be found. This view is shared by Gopin (2000) who contends that religious actors have a productive role in conflict resolution. The challenge, Gopin suggests, is to translate the insights of particular religious traditions for secular interpretation. We suggest that acknowledging one’s religious or spiritual foundation may provide insights as to how one views conflict. Building on Thomas’ (2005) view that religion is a critical part of human existence, akin to culture, we can deepen our comprehension of the pervasiveness of religion through the definition of culture presented by Triandis (1989, pp. 511-12):

culture is to society what memory is to the person. It specifies designs for living that have proven effective in the past, ways of dealing with social situations, and ways to think about the self and social behaviors that have been reinforced in the past ... When a person is socialized in a given culture, the person can use customs as a substitute for thought.

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The same assumptions about socialization can apply to the experience of religious practice. Since religion is a pervasive and salient component of culture, the utilization of religion in mediation can enlist communication strategies that can be more effective than several types of biological responses to conflict, such as aggression. Because humans are biological animals, they can not escape experiencing biological reactions that are innately programmed, but they can modify the expressions directed toward the target of anger at the experiential level (Georgakopoulos, 2004). In fact, it is at the experiential level that people can be cognizant of what communication strategies may be most appropriate (Georgakopoulos, 2004). Thus, in faith-based or spiritual-based mediation, the primary goal is promoting positive interaction and communication by using religious or spiritual principles. The faith-based or spiritual-based approach allows for greater deliberation since each party examines not only what is important to her or him but embeds religious or spiritual principles in the discussion.

### *Agenda for Mediation Research and Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

We present herein a review of mediation models which incorporate spirituality or religion in the hope of providing ideas to enhance current Western models. Western mediation models and definitions should be critically examined and different models developed to better assist individuals, groups, communities, and nations in conflict. In particular, indigenous mediation models that infuse religion and spirituality should be examined and considered for particular conflicts. Every mediation framework has an underlying ideology that is based on the individual(s) who developed it. Given this fact, people may benefit from mediators who anchor themselves according to particular religious or spiritual ideologies. We call for religious and spiritual mediation specialists for family, marriage, community, and international conflicts. The landscape of conflict is complex, therefore conflict and topic specialists are not only needed but required.

In the twenty-first century, particularly after September 11 2001, there has been increased attention on finding inner peace, meaning within one's life, and connection with others. Exploring and practicing one's spirituality or religion helps one to cope. With the changing acceptance of spiritual and religious beliefs among society, it has become more appropriate to embrace the influence of core spiritual and religious beliefs. Even in the political arena, citizens are more accepting of the idea that religion or spirituality be acknowledged and considered in public policy (Hecl, 2003).

Carl Jung (1933, pp. 240-1) suggests that man has always been in need of spiritual guidance, and created "religious or magical practices" to cope with changes in the world:

religions are the systems of healing for psychic illness ... Man is never helped in his suffering by what he thinks for himself, but only by revelations of a wisdom greater than his own. It is this which lifts him out of distress.

Jung further suggests that conflict is a pathway for transformation into a spiritual being – a being who reaches a higher potential to move beyond the conflict. This is further elucidated in the context of mediation; conflict can become spiritual when individuals experience a *shift* from positions of self towards cooperation and harmony (Phillips, 2001; Sidy, 1996; Zumeta, 1993). Spirituality, religion, energy, the divine, whatever one may call it, provides

an element that removes barriers and connects people to one another as they tell their stories and together co-create a new story which satisfies everyone's needs (Zumeta, 1993).

Lapin (1993) contends that human conflict is invariably rooted in the soul; that all humans carry within them "a spark of the Divine." He suggests that in the Western mode of conflict resolution, physical tools are being used to solve a spiritual challenge. Lapin posits that spiritually sensitive mediation is a far better tool in dealing with human spiritual needs than conventional litigation. He argues that attention to the symbolic and subjective aspects of one's spiritual belief system are crucial as they influence interpretations of lives and experiences. Sidy (1996) suggests that by recognizing the spiritual dimension of conflict resolution parties are better able to identify and address underlying causes of the conflict. He states, "conflict becomes spiritual when it motivates people to change mechanical and selfish patterns of behavior for behavior which manifests more harmony, cooperation, inner growth, and human dignity" (Sidy, 1996, p. 18).

Heron (2007, p. 10) suggests spiritual inquiry is one in which individuals interact with others in the present moment with the recognition of a "transcendent consciousness embracing our everyday awareness". Opening up to spiritual inquiry allows one to tap into an innate ability to feel and sense the world around us, through the presence felt by others, places and the environment; it is the ability that allows one to feel the interconnectedness of all things. In the context of conflict resolution, the mediator who practices spiritual inquiry can empower parties to be fully present and actively engaged with one another in exploring the conflict and possible resolutions.

Spiritual inquiry is defined by de Wit (1999, p. 3) as a moment when something breaks through in a crisis situation, when an individual clearly sees the situation as more than what it means to him or her personally, a moment when one sees with compassion and "spiritual humanism ... a moment of liberation that reveals new possibilities". He further suggests that a spiritual approach to life, which can be found within or outside of a specific religious tradition takes one from being *egocentric to egoless*. He likens this to going from the profane to the sacred, much as Durkheim described it, wherein one finds a spiritual aspect to everyday reality (see Ritzer, 2000). These moments are created, not when we attempt to create them, but only when our minds are free of thoughts and we become open to possibilities (Chupp, 1993; Cloke, 2006; de Wit, 1999; Ochs, 1983; Zumeta, 1993).

Zohar and Marshall's (2000) description of spiritual intelligence provides a context within which conflict resolution or transformation may occur. They suggest that spiritual intelligence "facilitates dialogue between reason and emotion opening the path for transformation (p. 7). They describe rational intelligence, as measured in IQ tests, as a linear progression of thought, and emotional intelligence (EQ) as adding a layer of association between thoughts and what emotions are associated with them. There is then a third layer of spiritual intelligence (SQ) which unifies or underlies them all, providing a context of meaning-making. They suggest that spiritual intelligence has transformative power in that it provides an avenue in which one is able to reframe or recontextualize a situation. It enables one to be creative, visionary and flexible in order to move beyond past habits and emotions towards recognizing and understanding a new reality. As they suggest, spiritual intelligence can take one "to the heart of things, to the unity behind difference, to the potential behind any actual expression" (Zohar and Marshall, 2000, p. 14)

*Indigenous Models – Grounded in Spirituality*

Practitioners suggest that, although spirituality is addressed in conflict resolution literature, it is often viewed as an optional approach rather than an integral part of the process, as it is with most indigenous resolution approaches (Cloke, 2006; LeResche, 1993; Walker, 1999). Umbreit (1995) views mediation as a *journey of the heart* and embraces elements of the Navajo tradition in his work with restorative justice. Mediation is a traditional form of conflict management for the Navajos and one in which attention is given to spiritual aspects of those in conflict in recognition of the relationship between the community and the spiritual realm (Pinto, 2000). Navajo mediation uses storytelling and a basic problem solving process similar to Western models, with an added component of beginning and ending with a ritual prayer and a focus on solutions “grounded in Navajo philosophy” (Pinto, p. 279).

LeResche (1993) suggests that there are 517 conflict transformation processes of American Indians in the U.S. alone. She refers to *sacred justice* which goes beyond a standard formula of conflict resolution to *going to the heart* of the conflict in which emotional expression is encouraged, and each individuals’ spiritual power is recognized. LeResche indicates that many indigenous cultures believe in a spiritual dimension of life and do not separate spirituality from the physical aspects of daily life; therefore, spirituality inherently becomes an aspect of conflict transformation. LeResche (1993, p. 321) states that, “[a]t its core, American Indian peacemaking is inherently spiritual; it speaks to the connectedness of all things; it focuses on unity, on harmony, on balancing the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical dimensions of a community of people”. She further illustrates the perspective of indigenous researchers that Western conflict resolution models lack a spiritual component; they do not recognize the natural and supernatural worlds within the process.

Walker (2004) discusses the need to acknowledge and integrate non-western worldviews in conflict transformation approaches in order to include a healing dimension and strive for a more holistic process. Holistic approaches, which include healing relationships and restoring harmony, are integral to many indigenous conflict resolution processes. Walker highlights four indigenous approaches: the Cherokee Talking Circle; the Hawaiian Ho’oponopono; the Iroquois Great Law of Peace, and the Navajo Justice and Harmony Ceremony. Each of these includes an integral spiritual component of interconnectedness of body, mind and spirit. Opening and closing rituals are used to establish connection and to help parties and the mediator search deep within for guidance and answers. The use of silence is viewed as an opportunity to lessen conflict. The use of a talking stick or other inanimate object helps participants reflect on what is being said by others and allows time for reflection and introspection on one’s own feelings. It is suggested that this time of silent reflection aids in conflict transformation and healing.

Huber (1993) sought to develop a mediation process based on Aboriginal models which would be applicable to Canadian Aboriginal people living in urban settings. She presented a mediation model based on Aboriginal spirituality, as she suggested that a cooperative focus of mediation has been practiced in various forms for centuries. Her research indicated that an appropriate model would contain the value elements of spiritual

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connectedness and the ability to heal through understanding. Based on Aboriginal values and beliefs, she designed a model around the medicine wheel, an ancient and valued symbol used for seeking inner wisdom. The four components of the wheel represent parts of the whole being grounded in the four directions: spiritual in the east, emotional in the south, physical in the west, and intellectual in the north.

Within the spiritual lies the opening rituals and setting of the sacred space for transformation to occur. Huber (1993) suggests that the mediator and the parties are able to connect spiritually with one another as the mediator establishes a presence with the parties and allows them to express emotions in a safe place. The emotional aspect is the place of the heart, where emotions are encouraged to be expressed and stories can be told without hurting one another. The physical dimension of the Western orientation is grounded in reaching and listening to the wisdom of one's inner resources through reflection and introspection. The north delineates the intellectual aspect of synthesizing what has occurred and the ability to detach oneself from emotions and strongly held beliefs to find resolution with others. Huber suggests that once parties reach the north or intellectual phase of the process, the mediator should symbolically move parties to the center of the wheel to illustrate a holistic approach. A closing circle of ritual or prayer completes the process. Huber pointed out the model's emphasis on feelings rather than cognitive thinking. The use of a circle orientation assists in face-to-face discussion (see below), and symbolizes that everyone present is necessary to resolve the conflict.

### *Western Models – Integrating Spirituality*

There is growing interest of the inherent spiritual aspects of the mediation process. Similar to LeResche's (1993) view of American Indian peacemaking, Zumeta (1993) states that, "mediation at its core is inherently spiritual" (p. 29), and speaks of spirituality as "the connectedness of all things" (p. 25). Her premise is that a spiritual mediator may bring about a sense of calm and connectedness, and such an atmosphere is a powerful aspect of the process. She suggests that the moment during mediation when a door opens for transformation is described through *spirituality and consciousness*. During those moments, she senses what she describes as a spiritual connection between her and the parties. She avers that it is the element of spirituality that removes barriers, and connects parties and the mediator, thus opening the path to reach into the heart or underlying compassion of everyone in the room. Phillips (2001) discusses spirituality through the concept of *flow* – as it opens the door for empowerment and recognition to occur in mediation. She speaks of *moments when something happens*: moments when we may not know exactly what happened, but we simply honor them and allow them to move the mediation process in the direction the parties need it to go.

Lois Gold (1993), a former chair of the Academy of Family Mediators, further advocates a more holistic approach to mediation within a paradigm of healing, as is consistent with many indigenous cultures. A healing aspect suggests that the mediator draws from his or her *spiritual center* in developing a positive relationship with the parties, and uses messages and ways of being with the parties that suggest and encourage a healing aspect of the relationship. Cloke (2000, p. 15) suggests that conflict is a spiritual

experience, an interconnectedness of all things with “constantly moving questions, options and possibilities”. Cloke further suggests that spirit happens unexpectedly when individuals come together and collaborate and views resolution as a movement of positive energy within and between parties as they reach the core or spirit of conflict. While spirit may be at the core of conflict, he regrets that Western mediation models, unlike indigenous models, do not address spirituality. Cloke does not advocate imposing spiritual practice on others, but rather encouraging parties in conflict to be aware of one another and of each other’s feelings, emotions and needs, and to be open to creative ways of finding meaning and resolution.

Bowling and Hoffman (2000) suggest that a mediator’s interventions are based on his or her ability to be with the parties, to be open to their perspectives, and to recognize and relinquish his or her view of what should happen in favor of developing a relationship with the parties. There are no outside assumptions or rote processes imposed upon the parties. Through reflective thought, the answers to the parties’ conflict lies within themselves. Watts, Miller and Kloepfer (1999) advocate a similar approach involving the use of questions for participants to seek answers to the conflict within themselves. They suggest developing collective consciousness through transcendent self-presence, a facilitative approach helping participants connect with their inner spiritual nature. The premise of the approach is to use questions which enable self-reflection and an increased awareness of collective group consciousness allowing “the group to become conscious of what it knows” (Watts *et al.*, 1999, p. 24).

One such questioning model is the Quaker Clearness Committee. Burson (2002) describes this model as one in which one or more people are assisted by a group to successfully move through conflict through intense conversation. This process is accomplished by allowing the group to step back into a state of shared silence that generates critical questions which ultimately serve to provide needed insight. This model stresses that the most important thing is not to have the right answers but to generate the right questions. The person or group requesting the session states the issue about which they are seeking clarity. The group cannot advise, evaluate or criticize. Their sole mission is to craft respectful and supportive questions that help the person or group find their own *heart-centered* answers. The most important task of the Clearness Committee is to ask open-ended questions designed to respectfully and artfully put someone in touch with their highest and best internal resources. Artful and intentional questioning is an element found among those practicing spiritual mediation.

Tom Porter (2004), a trial lawyer, mediator, and minister, acknowledges that mediation is about relationships, and that relationships involve spirit, or what he refers to as the energy that connects us all. Porter found the circle process to be the most applicable to the work of healing relationships through mediation. Peace Circles, which have been used for centuries in indigenous cultures, are used extensively in community restorative dialogue programs and more recently being explored with resolution of commercial disputes. Circles use a questioning approach in exploring the roots of one’s values and assumptions as parties within the circle work through a conflict situation. Getting to a precise answer may be secondary to learning to peacefully explore differences (Pranis, Stuart and Wedge, 2003).

Lederach (1995) applies a questioning approach in mediation training with groups comprised of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Rather than to assume that a standard mediation model is applicable for all groups, Lederach has each training group develop its own framework for working with others in resolving conflict. He begins the session by asking everyone to remember a time when they were having problems with another person, and asks them to carefully ponder the following question: "If things got difficult and you felt you needed help with this problem, who would you go to for help?" (Lederach, 1995, p. 86). As the group visualizes this image in their minds, he asks them to share with group members why they chose this particular person, what characteristics this person has, and what is expected from this person. As group members search for answers to the questions posed, they tap into their inner knowledge. The ability to recognize and acknowledge this inner guidance comes as parties become aware of the feeling of safety within this space created for resolution of the conflict.

Umbreit (2005) and Gold (1993) emphasize recognition of the emotional context of conflict, effective use of silence, creating a safe and *sacred space* for the mediation process to unfold, and helping parties listen to their *inner wisdom*. Umbreit (2005) is recognized for his humanist model of mediation in his work with restorative justice. His model is based upon the premise that the act of helping others in conflict is not that the third party has all the answers or specific technical expertise, but rather focuses upon the acts of *compassionate listening* and *speaking from the heart*. Key values of Umbreit's (1997, 2005) humanistic model include incorporating a belief in the *connectedness of all things*, in particular the mediator's presence and connection with the parties concerned. Umbreit speaks of the healing power of stories and the impact upon parties of knowing that the mediator is listening and acknowledging their emotions. He posits that allowing others to tell a story in a safe space, uninterrupted and without judgment or problem-solving, is at the *core of healing*. He suggests that discussing parties' positions may keep them in the *head*, whereas relating stories among the parties affects their *hearts*. The setting of a safe place in which to open one's heart comes not just from implementing active and reflective listening and reframing, but also from the mediator's genuine connectedness and presence; that is: *being with* parties, giving them full attention and allowing them to work through the challenges of the conflict with him/herself and with the other parties. In this process, Umbreit (2005, p. 26) relies upon non-verbal communication, which he refers to as *the energy of the conflict*: "I work with the energy of conflict, my own and others. The powerful non-verbal language of our bodies and spirit are far more potent in both understanding conflict and allowing the path toward healing to be engaged."

According to Chupp (1993), conflict transformation is a deeply spiritual process, going beyond settlement towards a shift in perceptions that transforms the conflict and the parties involved. He suggests that mediators are generally unaware of the spiritual aspect of conflict resolution, namely those moments when something profound occurs and one is not able to specifically describe what happened. Chupp claims that it is the guidance of opening parties to meaningful dialogue that brings about this shift; focusing strictly on procedure and technique actually hinders the potential of spiritual transformation. A mediator who is centered, fully present and open to guidance from inner resources is able to create a safe space for transformation to occur. The concept of providing a safe or sacred space for parties to process their conflict, a space in which they may have their feelings validated and

be comfortable in expressing a range of emotions, is well documented (Cloke, 2000; Gold, 1993; Umbreit, 1997; Zumeta, 1993). This safe space may be offered through recognition and acknowledgment of one's religious or spiritual world view.

### **Incorporating Spirituality and Religion in Mediation**

We advocate further exploration of the incorporation of spirituality and religion in the conflict resolution process. Roof (1999) posited that Americans are searching for deeper meaning in what they do and who they are. Many are searching for answers through affiliation with a specific religious belief system or from a blending of beliefs that help each individual make sense of the world. These beliefs become an element of culture and identity and are an integral part of how individuals live their lives and how they view others. The time is ripe for greater acceptance of exploring and acknowledging the power of addressing one's religious or spiritual makeup. The days of never mentioning religion or spirituality outside the setting of organized religion are over.

Research in the areas of therapy and health care indicates a link between religion or spirituality and positive reframing (Stefanek, McDonald and Hess, 2005; Wendel, 2003). If one's religion or spirituality helps one to find meaning within the context of health-related events, we argue that the same meaning making occurs in navigating other types of conflict. Spirituality and religion can guide individuals through conflict situations and should therefore be acknowledged by a third-party intervener. An article in the *Washington Post* cited by Buckholtz (2005) noted the increasing numbers of individuals seeking help through pastoral counseling. As one woman explained, her religion "guides the choices I make and how I make sense of the world. I didn't think a psychologist or psychiatrist would be sensitive to that." In response to this trend, the number of nationally-recognized academic programs offering pastoral counseling has doubled in the last five years, with most students seeking to help others in private practice rather than through a specific ministry (Buckholtz, 2005).

Honeyman, Goh and Kelly (2004) suggest that parties are moving from traditional methods of mediation towards seeking mediators who can provide a sense of *connectedness* and *authority*. They refer to "connectedness" as a sense that the mediator is a part of the process and not a detached neutral; similarly, "authority" is not the mediator's ability to make decisions but rather to his/her experience and serious approach to the role. Cobb (2001) discusses a shift in mediation from what she refers to as a first generation practice in which practitioners were held to a strict method or formula for resolving conflict. She discusses moments when *something happens* during mediation, and suggests that conflict may be a vehicle for a sacred experience to take place – something she describes as far more important than reaching settlement. She advocates that mediators move to a second generation practice wherein they modify basic assumptions of traditional methods and allow the process to flow in line with what the parties are experiencing. She encourages the opening of *sacred space*, in which emotions and feelings may be acknowledged. This movement beyond traditional methods is becoming more evident and accepted within the conflict resolution field.

*Four Elements of Peacebuilding*

Lederach (2004) offers an exploration of the art of mediation wherein individuals seek connection with one another and recognition of each person's real or authentic self. In this connection, individuals respect and tolerate or accept one another regarding who they are and where they are within the conflict. This connection provides a safe place for people to have those deeper conversations that need to occur in order to resolve the conflict. Lederach provides a summary of the above discussion within his description of four elements of peacebuilding.

The first element of this art of mediation – the capacity to imagine a web of relationships even with one's enemies – may be interpreted as the ability to recognize one's real or authentic self and to acknowledge it in other people. Most importantly from a mediator's standpoint, it is to help those in conflict to reach and to experience their authentic selves. This may be done through providing a safe or sacred space of non-judgment and allowing parties to explore, through thoughtful questioning and reflection, what it is that is important to them and why it is important.

The second element he describes is a discipline to sustain curiosity. A mediator who provides careful questioning and reflection invites parties to explore the meaning of everyday activities, thoughts and feelings. This exploration may not only help to illuminate the meaning of an action or phrase to the other party/parties but it also provides further understanding of the experience to the person sharing the information. Thoughtful questioning and reflection guide parties towards uncovering essential meaning thus leading to greater understanding. Within the third element – a belief in creativity and imagination – mediators are open to new ideas and new interpretations. Most importantly, they are not hindered by adherence to a specific model, techniques or line of inquiry; as artists, they are creative and imaginative in sensing the connection with and between others and are open to allowing this creativity to guide the mediation process where it needs to go.

The fourth element Lederach describes is a willingness to take a risk by stepping into the unknown. Those who practice the art of mediation from a spiritual perspective are open to the connections with and between others and are willing to allow the process to flow in order to guide parties towards resolution or transformation. Lederach concludes that the moral imagination (of peacebuilding) about which he speaks is not an answer but a journey. Attention to spirituality in the mediation process opens parties and the mediator to a journey in which parties find their authentic selves, are able to have conversations they were not able to have on their own, and which then opens them up to possibilities for resolution.

### **Conclusion**

Spirituality may be found wherever one finds its essence, which could be in the act of washing dishes, watching the sunset, walking in nature, or the words of religious text or the community of congregations. As Cloke (2005, p. 18) argues, “[b]y recognizing spirit we allow people to liberate themselves from confused ways of thinking and inauthentic ways

of being that got them stuck in the first place. For these reasons, every conflict contains a spiritual path leading to higher levels of resolution.”

There is growing thought that, although practitioners advocate going beyond theories and process and to become comfortable relying upon intuitive and creative abilities, formal education may be displacing intuition and instinct in the mediator (Benjamin, 2002; Phillips, 2001). In response, Bowling and Hoffman (2005) remind that: “[i]mproving our skills and knowledge about conflict resolution is important, yet as mediators we must not forget that who are matters as much or more than what we know or what we do” (p. 12)

Harvard Law School introduced the Harvard Negotiation Insight Initiative (HNII) in 2003, which has since become the Global Insight Initiative. Under the direction of Founder and Director, Erica Fox, first year law students and conflict resolution practitioners are taught to look beyond the physical, rational, and emotional components of decision making, to a fourth, spiritual component. As one participant in the inaugural HNII event stated, “HNII wants to get spirituality and conflict management talking” (Cohen, 2003). Many experienced mediators and negotiators in the program explained that although they could not describe exactly what they do, they base much of their work on *just knowing*, instinct, and intuition (Fox and Gafni, 2005).

We argue that understanding alternative mediation models can be valuable when assisting parties in conflict because conflict by nature is complex. In order to understand conflict, mediators need to extract important themes from parties – a process which can be guided by religion or spirituality. When individuals make a claim to be religious or spiritual, they should be motivated to follow religious or spiritual principles, thus valid judgment may best be derived when a mediator taps into one’s religious or spiritual frame of reference. That is, a place where knowledge is stored about *what should be, what is right, and what is best*. We argue that no single mediation approach will be useful for all types of conflicts but, in cases where when parties want religion or spirituality to direct them during conflict, a faith-based or spiritual-based approach can be crucial in mediation.

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