

# *Beyond Fixing*

*Suffering, Spirituality, and the Slow Work of  
Mental Health Care*



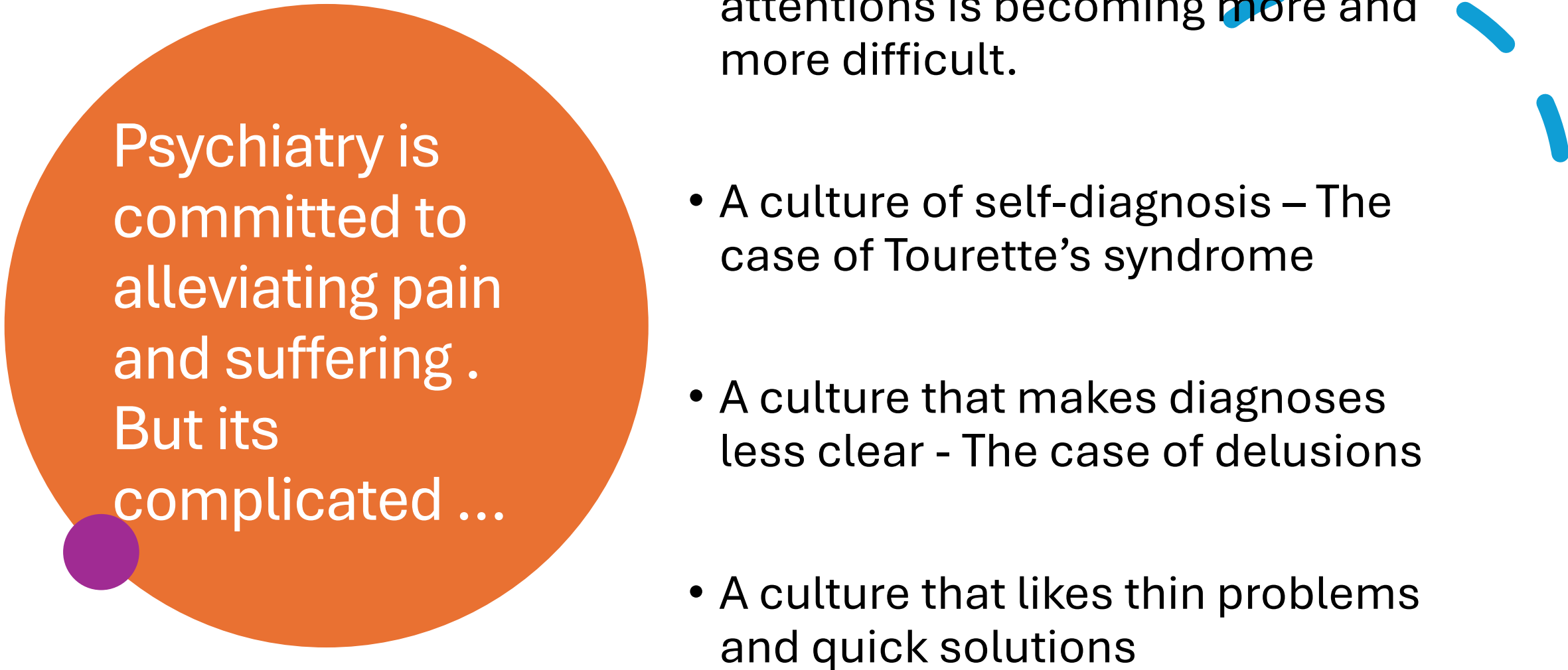
# Andrew Sims

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- Andrew Sims helped keep open an important space within psychiatry for serious engagement with faith, spirituality, and personhood.
- For Andrew, understanding patients (people) requires attention to the meanings, language, and values that shape their lives.
- Psychiatry is diminished when these realities are screened out of clinical care.

# Suffering

- Suffering is the lived experience of distress when pain, loss, limitation, or disorder press upon the whole person in ways that unsettle meaning, disrupt relationships, and expose vulnerability.
- *Pain* describes hurt; *suffering* names what that hurt does to the person and their world.
- Psychiatry deals with both pain and suffering




Psychiatry is  
committed to  
alleviating pain  
and suffering .  
But its  
complicated ...

- A culture of speed - Paying attentions is becoming more and more difficult.
- A culture of self-diagnosis – The case of Tourette’s syndrome
- A culture that makes diagnoses less clear - The case of delusions
- A culture that likes thin problems and quick solutions

# Thick and Thin Descriptions



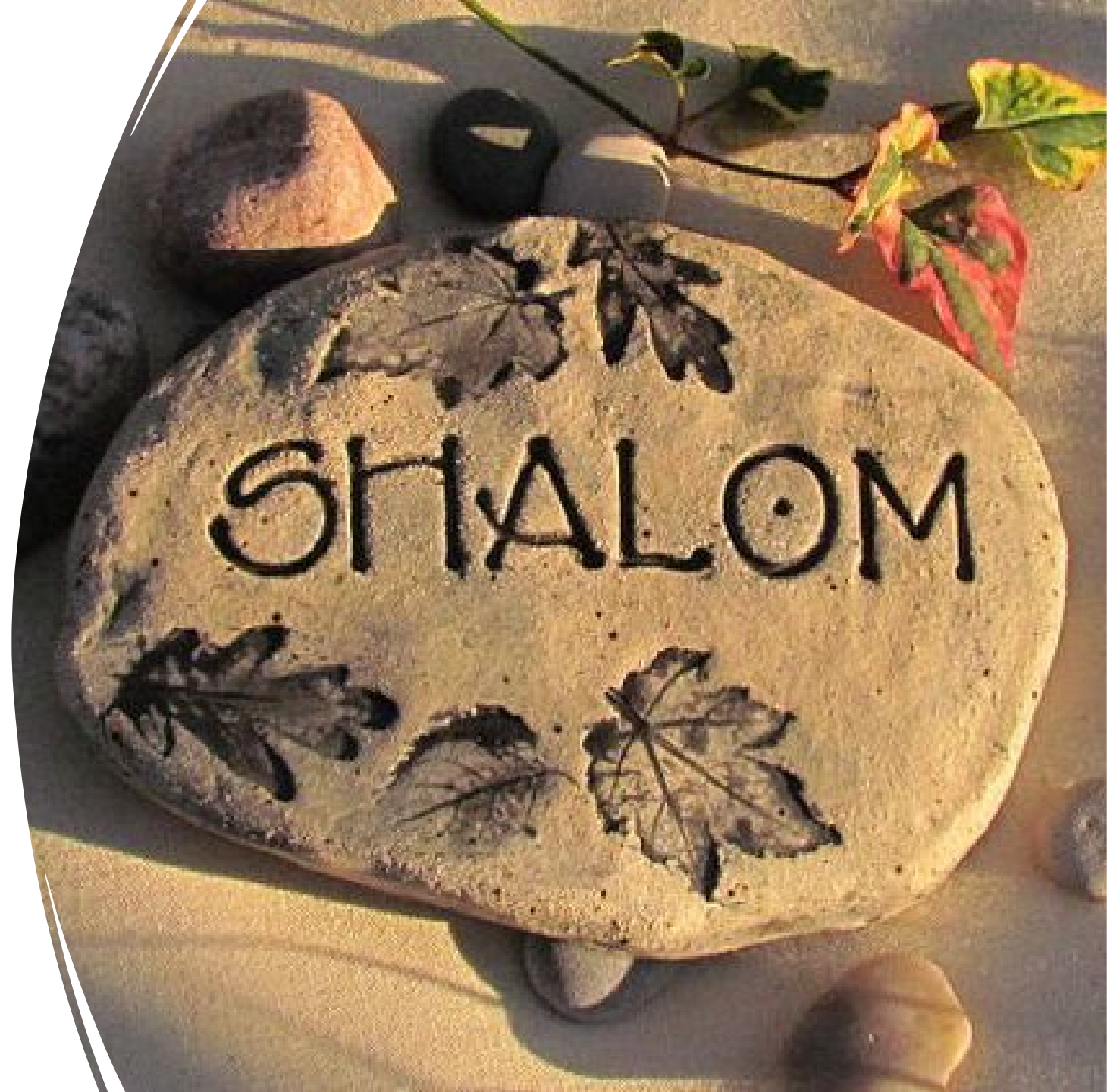
The image shows two women in traditional clothing, likely from a Southeast Asian ethnic group, engaged in embroidery. They are seated in a room where various colorful, patterned textiles are hanging on the wall. The woman on the left is working on a piece of red fabric with a yellow and black geometric pattern. The woman on the right is working on a piece of red fabric with a yellow and black geometric pattern. A spool of orange thread sits on a red fabric-covered stool between them. The background features several pieces of embroidered fabric with various patterns, including geometric shapes and stylized figures. The overall scene is one of traditional craftsmanship and cultural heritage.


A thick  
description  
of memory

# A Thick Description of Mental Health

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- Peace within minds
- Peace between minds
- Peace with creation
- Peace with God



A vibrant community garden scene at sunset. In the foreground, a diverse group of people, including a young girl, a woman with a coffee, a man in a green shirt, a woman in an orange shirt, a man in a grey sweater hugging a woman in a tan sweater, and a woman in a purple shirt, are engaged in conversation. In the middle ground, a group of people is seated at a wooden picnic table eating and talking. The background is filled with more people working in raised garden beds, some holding hands in a circle. A wooden sign on the right reads: "MENTAL HEALTH IS THE PRESENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS, NOT JUST THE ABSENCE OF ILLNESS." The scene is decorated with string lights and surrounded by lush greenery and colorful flowers.

MENTAL HEALTH  
IS THE PRESENCE OF  
RELATIONSHIPS,  
NOT JUST THE ABSENCE  
OF ILLNESS.

A stack of five smooth, dark grey stones is arranged vertically on a light-colored wooden surface. The stones are slightly out of focus, with the top one being the most prominent. In the background, a soft, ethereal blue light emanates from a vertical source, creating a misty or smoky atmosphere. The overall scene is dark and moody, with the light source providing a focal point of calm and tranquility.

## Healing and Curing



Allen's story:  
“Healing  
Schizophrenia”

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# Spirituality Matters

- Who am I?
- Where do I come from?
- Where am I going to?
- Why?

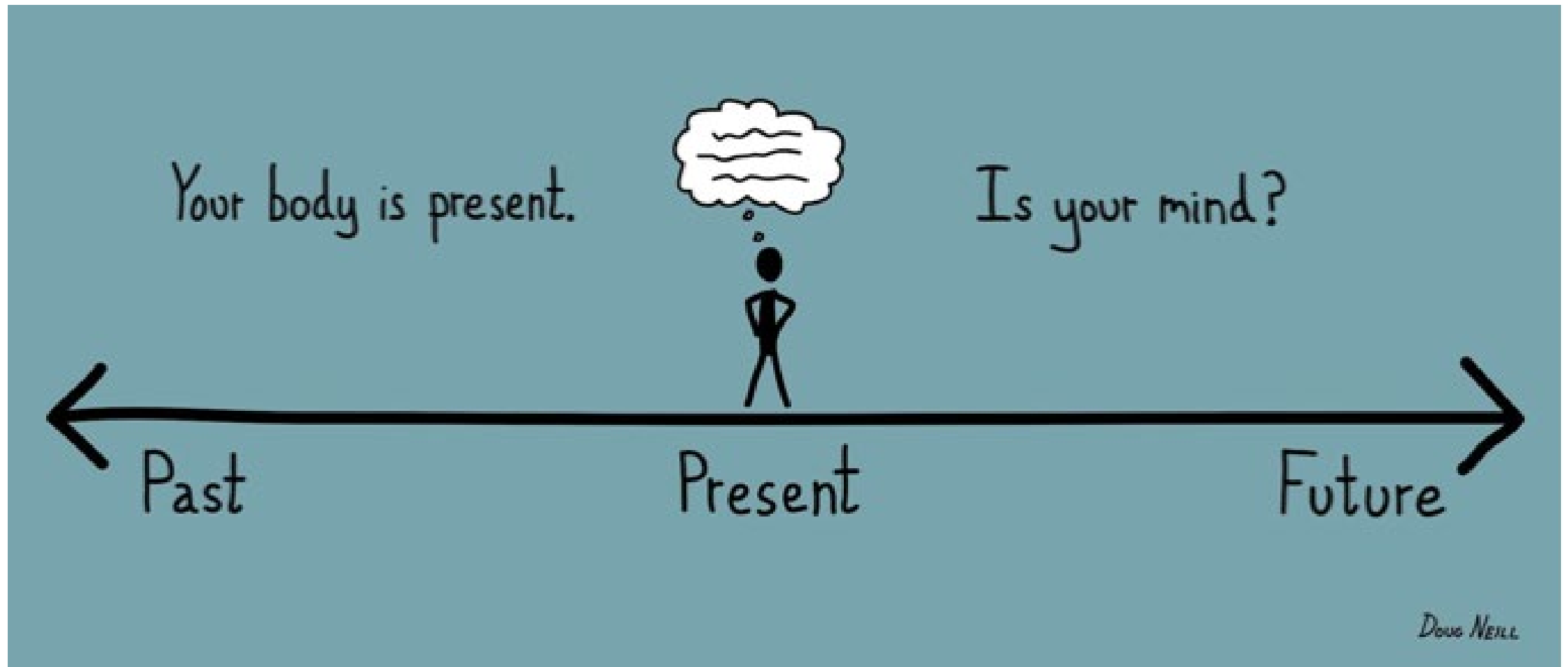




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Shalom,  
suffering and the  
practices of care

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## Paying Attention and Being Present

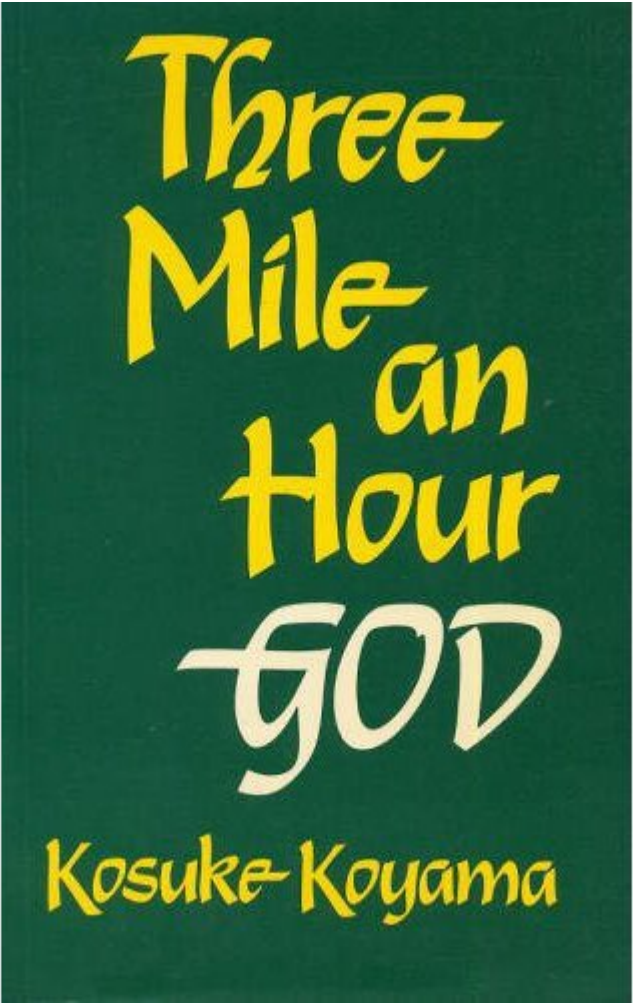


Presence,  
Suffering and  
Beatrice's prayers



# The problem of time

# The Three Mile an Hour God



Love has its speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice it or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore the speed the love of God walks.

- (Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an hour God*)

A woman in a green sweater is sitting at a desk in an office, stretching her arms upwards. She is smiling and looking towards the ceiling. The desk in front of her has a laptop, a keyboard, a mouse, a notebook, a pen, a glass of water, and a coffee cup. In the background, other office workers are visible at their desks, and large windows show a city skyline. The overall atmosphere is bright and professional.

# Re-Taking Time Micro-breaks

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# A thick description of depression



# James and the spiritual suffering of Depression:

- JS And what about when you are in the lower third? Is there anything that you can do there when you are really at the bottom?
- JD Drugs! Yeah, literally when I'm there I'm in a real scary... it is scary .... When I'm in my darkest places there is no God; there's no help, or at least there has not been when I've been there. And my greatest fear when I'm in those places is that I might die without knowing God more.




- JS Medication then in some senses has a spiritual role in getting you out of that place?
- JD Absolutely! Only because .... Ahhh ... how do I put this ... I need a good metaphor for it ... it's like, as a Christian I'm supposed to climb a ladder and I can look down this long wall and there's thousands of other Christians climbing their ladders. That is the spiritual effort/journey/direction and I can't climb the ladder and then someone comes along with a lift and carries me to the top of the wall. I'm now on the top of the wall. It is the spiritual wall. It's real. I just didn't get there the way everybody else gets there.

A woman with dark hair is sitting on a wooden floor in a dimly lit room. She is leaning against a wall, holding her head with both hands, and has a pained expression on her face. The room appears to be a simple, possibly institutional or homeless, setting with a window in the background and some items on the floor. The overall mood is one of suffering and despair.

# The problem of pain



The image features five white, round pills scattered on a dark, textured wooden surface. The pills are arranged in a loose cluster, with one pill at the top right, one at the bottom right, and three others in the center and left. The text "Medication Suffering and Spirituality" is overlaid in white, centered on the image.

# Medication Suffering and Spirituality

# BIPOLAR FAITH

A Black Woman's Journey  
with Depression and Faith

MONICA A.  
COLEMAN



## A thick description of medication

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*I held the green-and-white rectangle of pills in my hands. It was a simple question that required a tectonic shift in my own understanding of myself.*

# Medication and shalom



1. How will this medication impact a person's spirituality? Will it enable better quality of life?
2. What will the person gain when this medication is administered?
3. What will a person lose when this medication is administered?
4. For whose benefit is any given medication administered?

Suffering,  
shalom and  
kindness



# Conclusion

- **Spiritual care starts not with symptoms but with stories** — with identity, belonging, and meaning.
- Spiritual carers **bear witness** to the thickness of lived experience.
- **Mental Health as Shalom** - More than the absence of pathology: *peace within, between, beyond* — with self, others, creation, and God.



- **Medication as Meaningful Practice**

A bearer of spiritual healing ... a lift up the spiritual wall when ladders fail. **Its meaning lies in the story it enables, not merely the symptom it suppresses.**

Spiritual carers re-member fractured persons. They/**YOU** are midwives of hope, rather than mechanics of the soul.

