

Book Review

‘Mental Wellness: A Spiritual Journey. Finding Your Own Way to Healing from Depression, Anxiety and Addictions’.

Hamdy El-Rayes

Canada: Greenview Publishing 2011 (207 pages)

Reviewed by Mlindelwa (Bokani) Vundhla, Physician Assistant, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust, United Kingdom.

This book is ideal reading material for people experiencing mental health difficulties and those who act as their carers or those who into regular contact with service users. The author gives sound advice and practical guidance given on how to deal with particular mental health difficulties. These include depression, anxiety, neurotic disorders and addictions. One does not need to be unwell in order to appreciate the value of El-Rayes book. Since its focus is mental wellness, it can help the mentally well to maintain their wellness and prevent becoming affected by mental illness. I found the book personally useful at a difficult time; the book confirmed the usefulness of some positive strategies I was already utilising while it dissuaded me from using maladaptive strategies. I found myself re-evaluating my attitudes, motives and actions.

In the introduction, the author states that the book ‘addresses the process of healing from depression and anxiety’. It accomplishes this by introducing new and old concepts. These concepts are clearly defined in simple terms and appropriate examples given. Concepts such as ‘mental wellness’, ‘spiritually’, ‘destiny’ and the ‘circles of influence and concern’ spring to mind. The distinction between mental illness, mental health and mental wellness is clearly demonstrated. The author offers practical advice about how to set and achieve goals and objectives. Examples are breathing exercises and spiritual practice. This approach ensures that the book carries theoretical and practical value, and is suited to the person experiencing mental illness as well as those looking to maintain mental wellness.

El-Rayes’ views on accepting destiny allows those concerned to concentrate on how best to respond to what life throws at them. The author implies that many people spend too much time questioning **why** certain events have taken place, instead of concentrating on **how** to deal with each presented situation. The author’s definition of destiny is vague, seeming to mean ‘accepting how life is, rather than trying to change unchangeable things’.

The author uses scientific facts and evidence to drive his point across. Appropriate and sound mental health ideas are discussed. The relationship between body and mind is handled in this manner. Bodily reaction to acute and chronic stress is another example of sound science which gives his book scientific credibility. Spiritually is shown to have a positive impact on both physical and mental health.

However there is over-emphasis on the author's personal experiences. While this adds value to the author's credibility, it has its limits. El-Rayes' personal experiences could have been used more sparingly to better effect, bearing in mind that strategies which worked for him would not necessarily translate to other people's experiences. Citing the same personal stories in different parts of the book make it feel repetitive and tighter editing would have been helpful. El-Rayes' experiences of spirituality are based on his religion; not much coverage is given to other religions, or the 'non-religious but spiritual' perspective. I also found that whilst his coverage of depression and anxiety was adequate, there was a lack of substance on how to deal with the complex issue of addictions.

Overall the style of writing is effective due to its simplicity and enthusiasm and the use of diagrams and charts helps clarify concepts. For clinicians the book stimulates personal reflection and thus promotes reflective practice. It also provides a simple framework for approaching the issue of spirituality in mental health.

The book is mainly aimed at lay people and hits this target; it would be of less value to established clinicians. Since the author set out to produce a book about 'a process of healing depression and anxiety' I would say it has accomplished this, providing a useful self-help text for service users.