

RUNNING HEAD: WHAT IS SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

What is Spiritual Intelligence?

An Ecumenical, Grounded Theory

by

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## Abstract

This paper presents an ecumenical grounded theory of spiritual intelligence (SI), developed from thematic analysis of 71 interviews. Participants were nominated as spiritually intelligent by their colleagues, identifying themselves within most major spiritual traditions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Non-dual, Earth, Taoism, and Yoga. Seven major themes of SI emerged as nearly universal: *Consciousness*—developed refined awareness and self-knowledge; *Grace*—living in alignment with the sacred manifesting love for and trust in life; *Meaning*—experiencing significance in daily activities through a sense of purpose and a call for service, even in the face of pain and suffering; *Transcendence*—going beyond the separate egoic self into an interconnected wholeness; *Truth*—living in open acceptance, curiosity, and love for all creation (all that is); *Serenity*—peaceful surrender to Self (Truth, God, etc.); and *Inner-Directedness*—inner freedom aligned in responsible wise action.

## Introduction

Many studies show that cognitive intelligence, as measured by traditional IQ scores, explains only a small portion of career success or wellbeing (Goleman, 2001; Sternberg, 1997b). Over the last few decades, theories of multiple intelligences have broadened the concept of intelligence beyond IQ to include emotional, creative, practical, social, existential, and spiritual intelligences (Bar-On, 2000; Gardner, 1983, 2000; Emmons, 1999; Halama & Strizenec, 2004; Goleman, 2001; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004; Silvera, Martinussen, & Dahl, 2001; Sternberg, 1997a, 1997b). Whereas spirituality per se refers to the search for and experiential elements of the sacred, ultimate meaning, higher-consciousness, and transcendence (Friedman & MacDonald, 2002), spiritual intelligence (SI) emphasizes the abilities that draw on such themes to predict functioning and adaptation (Emmons, 2000a). Hence, SI can be differentiated from spiritual experience (e.g., a unitary state) or spiritual belief (e.g., a belief in God).

For the purpose of this research, SI was defined as the ability to apply and embody spiritual resources and qualities to enhance daily functioning and wellbeing. Despite prior discussions of SI (Emmons, 2000a; Vaughan, 2002; Wolman, 2001, Zohar & Marshall, 2000), there has been little qualitative research to develop a model of SI. This qualitative study of spiritual leaders from a variety of traditions develops such a framework using grounded theory methods.

### Literature Review

Spiritual intelligence involves a set of abilities that draw on spiritual resources (Emmons, 1999, 2000a, 2000b) in a manner similar to emotional intelligence, which defines a set of abilities that draw on emotional resources and information (Mayer, et al., 2004). Just as emotional intelligence is not equal to emotionality, spiritual intelligence is not equal to spirituality. While spirituality refers to the individual search for, and experiential elements of, the sacred, meaning, higher-consciousness, and transcendence (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988; Friedman & MacDonald, 2002), spiritual intelligence places a greater emphasis on abilities that draw on such spiritual themes to predict functioning and adaptation and to produce valuable products or outcomes (Emmons, 1999, 2000a, 2000b). Hence, SI combines the constructs of spirituality and intelligence into a new construct of spiritual intelligence.

Emmons (1999, 2000a) used Gardner's (1983, 1999) definition of intelligence—a set of abilities that are used to solve problems and create products that are valuable within a cultural setting or community—to look at spirituality through the lens of intelligence. Emmons (1999, 2000a) argued that spirituality can be viewed as a form of intelligence because it predicts functioning and offers capabilities that enable people to solve problems and attain valuable goals. In other words, spirituality is based on abilities that produce valuable outcomes. Research suggests a relationship between spirituality, life purpose and satisfaction, health, and wellbeing (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough., 2000; Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, &

Benson, 1991). Elmer, MacDonald, and Friedman (2003) reviewed research on the impact of spirituality on health and found that it contributes to lower disease rates and longer life.

In looking at spirituality through the lens of intelligence, Emmons (1999) wrote, “spiritual intelligence is a framework for identifying and organizing skills and abilities needed for the adaptive use of spirituality” (p. 163). Emmons (2000a) proposed five components for SI: (a) the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems, (b) the ability to enter heightened states of consciousness, (c) the ability to invest everyday activities and relationships with a sense of the sacred, (d) the capacity for transcendence of the physical and material, and (e) the capacity to be virtuous. However, in responding to criticisms from Mayer (2000), who argued that virtuous behavior belongs more to ethics and personality than to intelligence, Emmons (2000b) dropped the capacity to be virtuous and retained the first four components in his revised model of SI.

A somewhat different framework is offered by Vaughan (2002) who defined SI as “a capacity for a deep understanding of existential questions and insight into multiple levels of consciousness....It implies awareness of our relationship to the transcendent, to each other, to the earth and all beings” (p. 19). In focusing the definition of SI on issues of meaning, Zohar and Marshall (2000) defined SI as “the intelligence with which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer, meaning-giving context” (p. 3). Zohar and Marshall’s definition also highlights and hints at linking SI to a sense of connection to the wider and greater whole.

Wolman (2001) defined spiritual intelligence as “the human capacity to ask ultimate questions about the meaning of life, and to simultaneously experience the seamless connection between each of us and the world in which we live” (p. 83). Wolman developed the Psycho-Matrix Spirituality Inventory and identified seven factors pertaining to spirituality: community, divinity, mindfulness, extrasensory perception, intellectuality, trauma, and childhood spirituality.

Based on his study of some of the world's major spiritual traditions (Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Islam, Judaism, Shamanism, and Taoism), Walsh (1999) identifies 7 common practices that are universal across these traditions, including connecting with one's soul desire, learning to love, living ethically, concentrating and calming the mind, recognizing the sacred in all things, cultivating wisdom, and embracing generosity and the joy of service.

Ingersoll (1998) interviewed a cross-cultural panel of 12 people representing 11 different spiritual traditions to identify 10 common dimensions of spiritual wellness: conception of the absolute or divine, meaning, connectedness, mystery, sense of freedom, experience-ritual-practice, forgiveness, hope, knowledge-learning, and present-centeredness.

Several themes and qualities pertaining to an ecumenical view on the adaptive application of spirituality to daily life appear common across the above mentioned authors. The common themes among these authors include expanded consciousness, existential meaning, connection to the sacred, and interconnection, community, and transcendence.

#### Method

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used in this study, in which 71 interviews were conducted with participants designated as spiritually intelligent by their colleagues. Beginning with a convenience sample of people known to the author, participants were recommended by their peers as examples of individuals who embody spirituality in daily life in ways that enhance their functioning and wellbeing. Using snowball sampling, interviewees were asked for additional interview candidates. The sample included people who identified themselves within most of the major spiritual traditions (listed alphabetically): Buddhists—7, Christians—7, Earth-based (shamanic and pagan)—6, Integrative (personal integration of several eclectic traditions)—20, Hindus—5, Islamic/Sufis—5, Jewish—7, Non-dualists (spiritual self-realization involving the transcendence of subject-object duality)—

5, Taoists—4, and Yogis—5. The majority were designated as spiritual teachers within their traditions, such as priests, rabbis, swamis, or sheikhs. Some were therapists or business leaders who had integrated spirituality into their work. The majority of interviewees resided in the Northern California region of the United States, and 36 were female while 35 were male.

The participants were asked to describe their spirituality in terms of the practices and qualities they cultivated in daily life. How spirituality informed their work and relationships; and how they integrated, and drew on their spirituality to help in daily functioning. At the end of the interview, they were asked to comment critically on the emergent themes from these interviews.

Using grounded theory, the researcher used open coding to identify individual properties (e.g., gratitude, joy, and appreciation of beauty), axial coding to identify the themes (e.g., love of life, which combines all of the above properties), and selective coding to identify higher-level themes (e.g., grace, which combines three themes: love of life, aligning with the sacred, and trust). HyperResearch version 2.6.1 running on a Windows XP computer was used to do the coding. Interviews continued until the model converged and saturated.

## Results

Seven major themes and 16 sub-themes emerged as universal across participants. Each of the themes, sub-themes, and the major subcategories and codes are described below along with corroborating quotations. The total number of participants who spoke about some aspect of the theme or sub-theme is contained within parentheses following the name of the theme. While the themes are listed linearly as if they were independent dimensions of SI, in fact they often relate, build on, and interpenetrate one another. For example, acceptance, embracing, and love of truth were often mentioned by participants as linked to equanimity, peacefulness and inner-freedom, as in the New Testament “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John, 8:32). Similarly, trust was frequently related to freedom from fears, equanimity, and peacefulness.

*Consciousness (71)*

Consciousness refers to a developed refined awareness and self-knowledge. All participants spoke about some aspect of developing their consciousness, using a variety of practices to develop greater mindfulness, and transcending analytical and logical means using intuition to access knowledge. In the words of one of the participants from the Yoga tradition

The quality that I am trying to engage or promote, actually in my life, and that of the larger world, is the evolution of consciousness. (Yoga participant)

Three sub-themes emerged under the consciousness theme: mindfulness, transrational knowing, and practice.

*Mindfulness (69)*. Mindfulness is the knowing of self and living consciously with clear intention and mindful, embodied awareness and presence. Participants spoke about developing self-knowledge and awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, cultivating presence and witness consciousness, and pausing and reflecting to act with clarity of intention.

Being present to myself and to other people and being open to what's going on and not acting too quickly and not acting precipitously or impulsively. (Christian participant)

Becoming more aware of the fundamental aspects of your present tense reality, your breath and your body and the thoughts rising and falling in the mind and things which you are usually oblivious to. (Integrative participant)

Mindful presence is important in terms of being exquisitely aware and attentive of what is going on, without jumping the gun and having to act quickly. In the CIA they train to pay attention and notice everything, like the color of the socks of the guy sitting in the back. You don't work at being mindful, you are just aware. (Taoist participant)

Becoming present, and then there is this tremendous gift for me of inquiry which is when I am not present, “What’s getting in the way? What are the dynamics in my internal process?”

(Integrative participant)

*Transrational knowing (57)*. Transrational knowing is transcending rationality through a synthesis of paradoxes and using various states of consciousness, such as meditation, prayer, silence, intuition, and dreams to access knowledge. Participants also discussed the use of extra-sensory perception (ESP), and seeking guidance from one’s higher self.

I am a big believer on intuition, I mean there is a little chapter on intuition in one of my books, and dreams as well, very important stuff, and particularly in business. Most businesses seem to take the aspect of the cognitive mind and the logical mind is in fact where the answers are, and I am not one to say “ignore the logical and the cognitive,” but we have to stop ignoring the intuitive. It is just imperative that we really get serious about supporting people in using their intuition. (Integrative participant)

Spirit to me is the wholeness, the unity that encompasses polarity. It holds together opposing forces and creates harmony. So if you want to walk in the world as a person in peace and harmony or harmonious force you have to be big. You have to have the ability to contain opposites and that means making room for your opinion and the opposite and knowing that truth is the unity of opposites. If you get too fixed in your perspective as being the only truth, you create conflict, me against you. So to be a peace maker you have to be a person of spirit, as I see it, it is to have this larger vessel, this larger container....Perseverance and determination has to do with surrendering and humility, again balancing opposites. (Jewish participant)

Meditation is that time of making conscious communion with Divine Mind or higher power or whatever you want to call it, and listening, going into the silence and just listening, and



for me it's like giving me a chance to really connect with that internal intuition, that gut level, they talk about that our second brain is in our gut. (Christian participant)

*Practice (69)*. Practice means using a variety of practices to develop and refine consciousness or spiritual qualities. Participants spoke of having regular spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, contemplative self-reflection, inquiry, silence, study of scripture, energy body practices such as Yoga, or Tai Chi, and of spending time in nature to refine their consciousness, develop spiritual qualities, and open to and align with the sacred.

My regular practices are the practice of mindfulness: It can be in sitting meditation or through the activities of the day, the four foundations of mindfulness, mindfulness of my body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of thoughts and mind, and then mindfulness of the dharma. (Buddhist participant)

I do meditation and I do prayer. I believe in the power of prayer as well as meditation, and prayer and meditation are not exactly the same but if you are praying right eventually you come into a meditative state. (Jewish participant)

I do an examine at the end of the day, which is to go through the day and see what my consolations were, what my desolations were, where I was in focus aligned with my values, and where I was challenged and what happened and what I learned from that and how I can do better in the future. So like bookends, I begin and end the day with the spiritual check-in. (Integrative participant)

*Grace (70)*

Grace implies living in alignment with the sacred and manifesting love for and trust in life. Participants spoke of living in harmony with the divine, manifesting love for life, joy, gratitude, and appreciation of beauty, as well as trust that “things will work out for the best.”

I think the result of having spiritual intelligence is living in integrity, living in truth, and then there is no division, then there is that still, silent, source of peace within us, around us, that we are part of that, we are connected to our higher self, our deepest values, we are one with God, we're in a state of grace. (Integrative participant)

The theme of grace included three sub-themes: the sacred, love of life, and trust.

*Sacred* (60). The sacred refers to aligning with the divine, a universal life force, nature, or one's true essential nature. Participants spoke of living in harmony with spirit, God, the Tao, the absolute, or nature. Participants also spoke of living in alignment with their soul or true nature, honoring the divine in all manifested forms, and experiencing reverence for the mystery of life.

It's important to be in alignment with yourself and in alignment with whatever your experience of the divine is, and being in alignment, it's like what the Aikido teacher, O-Sensei (the founder of Aikido) talks about: There is only one center in the universe and if you are in alignment with the center of the universe, then anything that comes at you, it doesn't have a chance, because they are fighting the whole universe. (Christian participant)

The universal life force, the creator, has its own rhythm and we can get in tune and have rapport with the force. When one is with the force, it is difficult to do anything wrong. (Taoist participant)

The recognition of the divinity within all the manifest forms that I can look at, a butterfly or a human or a dinosaur or a cat or a plant or a rock and realize that that's an articulation of divine. There are different kinds of articulations. The human species is an articulation in which the divine is able to recognize itself. It is the ability to really recognize the divinity in all life forms and relate to that....So spirituality for me was informed by nature, the reality of spirit in mountains and rivers and the trees. (Christian participant)

*Love of life (65)*. Love of life means a reverence and cherishing of life based on gratitude, beauty, vitality, and joy. Connecting and aligning with the divine, participants experience joy, happiness, and gratitude for the abundance of positive things in life. By aligning with essence or the source, participants also experience vitality, energy, and passion. Participants reported living in awe and reverence for the mystery and shimmering beauty of life.

I am awakened by the chapel bells, in the form of the great dog Augustus over there and I used to kind of resent the fact that he woke me up every morning. Now I just treat his wet nose as the chapel bell and then we go for a walk. The little things, cleaning up after meals, helping my wife with grocery shopping, those things that I used to think as being in the way of the important things, I now see as having their own beauty in their own purpose and the way in which those little things can be an expression of love. (Christian participant)

Sense of joy and love, appreciation of the beauty, intrinsic sense for most of life, the sacredness, a sacred mirror. (Non-dual participant)

Mitzvah, blessings -- the nature of blessing includes gratitude but has more. It's such an awesome reverence and beauty. (Jewish participant)

Letting ourselves dance the world alive, dance ourselves alive, blessing the crops. (Earth-based participant)

*Trust (59)*. Trust means a hopeful/optimistic outlook based on faith or trust. Participants spoke of trust, faith, hope, and optimism that everything will work out for the best. This trust seems to come from a deep confidence in life, the universe, and the divine.

Love is stronger than hate, and life is stronger than death and that there is always renewal, always renewal, always renewal. So when I am at my most discouraged I can go out in the yard, and there are these daffodils out there, there is one right now in my front yard that

came out of nowhere, life comes back, and I like that. I see real parallels there of new life and people rebuilding and people coming back into humanity again. (Christian participant)

I call it confidence—confidence that I am connected with the Divine. And this confidence, even when I screw up or forget, it comes back, and I really feel a confidence now that my life is aligned with the Divine will. (Yoga participant)

You know the whole thing about hope in medical recovery, hope is very important. But it's not the hope for a particular outcome....I think people's sense of hope gets restored if they can find meaning in their experience, but we know for a fact that people recover from major illness when the hope factor is there and some of the hope has to do with meaning and some of it has to do with the actual hope for a recovery. And my parents were survivors of Auschwitz and they didn't give up hope and that was what kept them alive, it was just having hope. (Jewish participant)

There is a sense of trust that things are unfolding as they are supposed to but not a sense of a kind of optimism where you just are kind of projecting to a future that doesn't exist yet. (Buddhist participant)

### *Meaning (68)*

Meaning refers to experiencing significance in daily activities through a sense of purpose and a call for service, even in the face of pain and suffering. Among the most frequently mentioned sources of meaning for participants was a call for service—service to others and/or service to the divine, which often leads to service to others. Participants also spoke of a sense of responsibility and custodianship to the earth, future generations, and the greater whole. Others spoke of a sense of purpose or a personal mission that transcended purely material goals.

Meaning is often experienced when activities are aligned with values. Participants spoke of the redemptive value, learning, and meaning derived from the pain, suffering, and challenges of life.

I would refer to this mission of mine to help people add value to their lives and wanting to do that with millions as my call for service on the broader scale.... I can do that in any environment. I can do that with the man that's going to be picking up my garbage in the next 30 minutes. I can do something to help people add value to their lives. (Integrative participant)

Why I was drawn to this, I don't know, but it's something that will not leave you alone, in the west you might refer to it as calling, simply something that will not leave you alone. It comes close to what Frankl refers to as meaning, becomes your holy call, your sacred mission. (Taoist participant)

If I can articulate what Judaism means to me, it's that it's a call to service to God, but that means sort of service on many different levels. And it's not just about enlarging and developing a meaningful life for yourself but in some way serving others so that they too can have something that is meaningful in their lives and then helps them open to what's there for them. So that too adds a kind of meaning to people's lives. (Jewish participant)

I think for one thing any spiritual perspective—no matter what the orientation—allows people to hold their life in a way that offers something that speaks to meaning, meaningfulness, and purpose. You are just not suffering aimlessly. You are suffering to learn something and from that suffering kind of emerge a human being with a larger perspective, with more compassion, with somewhat more wisdom. (Islamic participant)

### *Transcendence (71)*

Transcendence refers to the ability to go beyond the separate egoic self into an interconnected wholeness. Participants spoke of transcending their “skin encapsulated ego” and feeling connected to other people, the entire human race, the earth, nature, and the cosmos. This feeling of connection and unity involves experiencing oneness while paradoxically also

appreciating diversity and differentiation. In the words of one of the Integrative participants this implied “feeling connected and unified with nature and with other people.”

The Transcendence theme contained two sub-themes relating to experiencing the interconnection and unity among everything in the entire cosmos (Holism), and feeling connected to other humans (Relational I-Thou).

*Holism* (61). Holism means the ability to utilize a systems perspective, to see the wholeness, unity, and the interconnection among the diversity and differentiation. Transcending the small egoic self, participants spoke of Non-dual awareness, seeing the oneness among the diversity and differentiation around us. Participants also talked about taking a wide system’s perspective to solve problems more holistically by seeing the interconnection among everything. Experiencing this interconnection and interdependence among all of life resulted in greater awareness and concern for eco-sustainability.

There is a tremendous sense of unity that we associate with spirituality, which is the dissolving of separate self in sense of full communion, and at the same time differentiation—being one with everything and being completely a unique expression.  
(Integrative participant)

A systems approach is that seeing of connectedness. The moment you feel connectedness, your whole attitude and mental model shifts. Now you begin to see our global planet as one and my action has an impact on you and your action has an impact on me...And for me spirituality is a sense of oneness, when I lose my ego identity, my narrow self, the “small-I” and I begin to feel oneness with a larger self. (Hindu participant)

These are earth teachings of a way of wholeness that’s often called the Beauty Way. It starts with the premise that we are whole, that we are born as whole beings, and that we are part of

the wholeness of the life around us, part of the wholeness of the earth. (Earth-based participant)

*Relational I-Thou (70)*. Relational I-Thou is the nurturing of relationships and community with acceptance, respect, empathy, compassion, loving-kindness, generosity, and I-Thou orientation. The Relational I-Thou theme had the widest number of subcategory codes covering a wide range of qualities relating to human interactions. These included seeing others as ends rather than means; the capacity for empathy and compassion in human relations; listening to and treating others with respect; acceptance, and non-judgment; love and kindness towards fellow human beings; generosity and helping others; nurturing of relationships; team collaboration; being part of a community; appreciation of diversity within the larger human family; and seeing other humans as a reflection of the divine.

Treating the others as divine and absolutely who they are....They become less instrumental to your egoic desires, that there is the I-thou relation that you might actually see the divine in them which is in you. (Integrative participant)

And when we finally get it that we are not separate from each other that we are no more separate from each other than the five fingers on my hand are separate from my body, they are just digital articulations of the same hand. And so that everything that exists is just a different manifestation of the divine. So service is not one ontologically discrete entity reaching out to another ontologically discrete entity in some kind of helpful modality, it is the system being aware of itself. So all service is the realization that the organism is looking out for itself. And I think this is a true meaning when for instance somebody like Jesus Christ says love your neighbor as yourself, the reason you love your neighbor as yourself is because your neighbor is yourself. (Christian participant)

When there is that intuition of non-separateness there is again these qualities of compassion and empathy and generosity that just spontaneously arise. How could I wish you-myself ill? Doesn't feel plausible. (Non-dual participant)

I am hurting but they have strokes. They are recovering from strokes or have had spinal cord injuries or severe osteoporosis and things that put them in a much more fragile state than I am in. So by being around people that are sometimes even hard to look at, that opens my heart. And it's not like "well they are suffering more than I am." It's more like being in this healing water together and it takes me out of my I and puts me in a We. (Earth-based participant)

### *Truth (70)*

Truth refers to the ability to live in open acceptance, curiosity, and love for all creation (all that is). Since truth, all that is, or all of creation, is a manifestation of the divine, participants spoke of living in openness, acceptance, and love for truth. This openness, curiosity, and love for truth is reflected in the words of one of the Integrative participants:

We have been instructed to love God, with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul.

That's how I love inquiry. This process of intelligence within life that can, that wants to, that is curious about, and wants to know: What is the truth? What's real? What's truly there?

The Truth theme included two sub-themes: acceptance, and openness.

*Acceptance (66)*. Acceptance means the ability to forgive, embrace, and love what is, including the "negative" and shadow. Non-judgmental acceptance and love of truth (what is) implies practicality and a healthy reality orientation. This means forgiving, accepting, and embracing even the "negative" and shadow aspects.

I couldn't imagine a universe were some parts of it were divine and other parts weren't. It just doesn't make sense to me. And so I just came to the belief at some point that there is



nothing that isn't divine, that the very substance that we are made up of is divinity and that if I wanted to be in touch with the divine, all I had to do was be in touch with what was, wherever I was. But that would include these horrifying things like body fluids and being human and jealousy and issues with money and issues with relationships, all the stuff of being human that most people don't want to explore. (Integrative participant)

Radical acceptance—allow it to be what it is. (Taoist participant)

Have that fundamentally loving approach to everything in creation. (Islamic participant)

Forgiveness is certainly something that's on my mind this time of year. I think forgiveness comes in two ways. One is to look at somebody and say they are going to be different now, and so I forgive you because I see that you feel bad and you are not going to do it to me again. But the other kind of forgiveness, which is I think the bigger one, which is what I struggled with around Yom Kippur [Day of Atonement] before, which relates a little bit to what I was telling you about my aunt, is being in relationship with people even though they are not going to change. Sort of an acceptance of who that person is without needing them to change, to recognize the sort of wholeness of who they are and take that. (Jewish participant)

*Openness (63)*. Openness means open heart and mind, and open curiosity, including open respect for the wisdom of multiple traditions. Consistent with acceptance of truth, participants often spoke of being open, spacious, and curious. This implied respect for other spiritual and wisdom traditions, which is in contrast to fundamentalism. Reflecting these qualities of open heart and open mind, most participants, even among those who identified themselves within a single primary tradition, spoke of respecting and drawing on the wisdom of multiple traditions:

It is obvious that Jewish tradition is my absolutely dominant source although one thing I have learned over the years is this great respect for other traditions and how we can nourish

each other. And in my experiences I have had opportunities both to meet and observe people who are from other faith traditions. It's helped me a lot. And I think the best for us is when we are able not only to practice our own but to listen to others and be in dialogue and learn from and maybe teach others too. (Jewish participant)

In this so called Twisted Hairs tradition, they want people to study two other traditions outside of their own. So I am apprenticed to the Native American shamanic tradition and it requires me to study other traditions as well, outside of what would look like Native American spirituality.... And the hair of one tradition and the hair of another tradition was braided together into one braid that's called the "Twisted Hairs." (Earth-based participant)

The people I admire spiritually have this sparkle, this glow, they are always learning, they are open, they are curious, they have never lost that childlike curiosity and you can see it in them, this real joy and excitement instead of being cynical and blasé. So I think that openness is part of it, part of being alive. (Integrative participant)

It's a feeling of opening your heart, opening your eyes, being more clear about things and being more openhearted about things. (Buddhist participant)

### *Serenity (71)*

Serenity means peaceful surrender to Self (Truth, God, Absolute, true nature, etc.).

Participants talked about the equanimity and inner-peace they achieve when they let go of struggles of the ego and surrender themselves to the higher-Self. For some this meant surrendering and trusting Truth, while for others it meant letting go, allowing, and surrendering to God, the Absolute, or True Nature. In dissolving the need to protect one's false sense of self, or ego, participants spoke of entering the state of equanimity and inner peace. For example, one Islamic participant spoke of any lack of anger at his superiors and his experience of inner peace in surrendering to and trusting the divine while being laid off from his job:

Why would I be angry with you? You haven't given it and you are not taking it. The real giver and the real taker [will take care]. Why have these negative thoughts, negative feelings at each other? And you can be in peace with people, you can be in peace with yourself and you can be in peace with the whole creation. (Islamic participant)

Noticing where you start to get hooked, where your ego gets engaged and either you are getting offensive or defensive. There is a wonderful term in Buddhism called "equanimity," and I know that when I am in that place I don't have a big ego that I am defending. (Buddhist participant)

Serenity consisted of two sub-themes: Peacefulness and Egolessness.

*Peacefulness* (69). Peacefulness refers to centeredness, equanimity, self-compassion, self-acceptance, and inner-wholeness. Participants spoke of being centered or calm inside even in the midst of chaos around them. Participants also talked about reaching harmony and balance within themselves (e.g., by balancing the masculine and feminine within), leading to inner wholeness.

Others spoke of patience, self-acceptance, self-compassion, equanimity, and inner-peace.

When we are in a situation of conflict, we can drop down into the center, it's like that stance in Aikido, and everything else around us is the same, but we have just shifted our focus enough so that we are rooted in our own spiritual strength, and we are at peace in the center of all this chaos, which is what I felt when the attorneys were going at it and trying to fire my colleague and all this stuff and I just thought, "this is what I choose to do," and there was no fear, there was just this sense of peace and rootedness in what I truly believed. It's like right beneath the surface, like in the water, there might be all these surface waves and turbulence but underneath that there is this depth of silence and peace, and it's probably inside of us all the time if we can just get down more. (Integrative participant)

When you or your baby falls down, you pick it up. Even with the best intentions you will stumble so we need self-compassion. (Jewish participant)

If we're looking at a wheel of humanity, what are we like as human beings? Spirit is one part of that, but it's not all of it. The wheel of humanity is spirit, body, emotion, and mind. Those four make up a human, and there is a lot in each of those. But when all four of them are present and in balance, then it's much easier to know what's needed. The question of the chiefs was what's needed for wholeness and balance. (Earth-based participant)

*Egolessness (63)*. Egolessness is the letting go of persona to maintain humble receptivity, surrendering, and allowing of what wants and needs to happen. Participants spoke of dissolving the need to defend or protect the false self or the ego's self image. This letting go results in reduction of false pride, reduction in narcissism, not taking things personally in interpersonal interactions, greater humility, and receptivity to follow and channel the divine. Participants also talked about the distinction between surrender and passivity.

I am a dancer and I dance Tango and the part of the follower is to surrender without losing one's sense of self. And the reason I am a good follower is because I can sort of blend what I am doing with the person who is leading. So when I dance, I am dancing a different dance because each person has their own way of hearing the music, so I surrender for those three minutes to the person. It's easy for me to do, but I don't lose my sense of self. So I may surrender to the Holy Spirit but I don't lose my sense of self, I am not passive. (Integrative participant)

The humble openness and allowing come in when you actually know that you are aligning with the sacred, and that you are part of a whole, and that it's not just your little ego itself that is the proper focal point. (Buddhist participant)

I keep becoming a better person the more that I continue to observe my ego and let go of it and learn humility, and to learn humility without giving away power, to learn how to surrender without submitting, to learn the nature of true power. (Integrative participant)

*Inner-Directedness (69)*

Inner-Directedness refers to inner-freedom aligned in responsible wise action. Participants talked about exercising freedom, choice, and responsibility, while acting in alignment with their own inner compasses from a place of inner knowing:

Rather than being externally driven, it becomes internally expressed out of one's knowing rather than out of what you think you should do. It becomes what you know to do. (Yoga participant)

Living comfortably inside one's own skin and it's a kind of real comfort being who you are and less and less needing other people to validate you and be the mirror that tells you "you are great." It's some sense of my own life, I can feel my heart beating—I am connected to myself and my own belief system. (Integrative participant)

Courage to really live what we truly believe, to be in touch with our deepest values.... And you read autobiographies of people who have done amazing things, they all feel called to do something, and whether it's Dorothy Day or Jane Goodall or Nelson Mandela there is something, some light within them that they tune into, that they nurture, and that they uphold to the world. (Integrative participant)

Inner-Directedness consisted of three sub-themes: freedom, discernment, and integrity.

*Freedom (65)*. Freedom is the liberation from conditioning, attachments, and fears, and the manifesting of courage, creativity, and playfulness. Participants spoke of inner-freedom and liberation from conditioned social norms. With this inner-freedom comes the responsibility and

courage to face and go beyond one's fears. With this inner-freedom, comes greater non-attachment, letting go of grasping, and having a more creative and playful attitude towards life.

One becomes a good deal more authentic, as you become free of fears, including the ultimate fear of losing your life. Life negotiators can't be attached to outcome; otherwise they can't get their job done. (Taoist participant)

And if I can have the courage to risk and step out and show up, then I am not limiting possibility and creativity, and if I am able to really listen within and be moved from within too, that unleashes creativity. (Islamic participant)

The insight about the impermanence makes it easier to play....We have all these different aspects of response available to play with and the play is really an expression of freedom. When there is little at stake, when you are not busy, preoccupied trying to protect yourself, play is available for what wants to happen. Play is the enjoyment and generation of possibility and that's the lifelong force. (Integrative participant)

*Discernment (59)*. Discernment is the wisdom to know truth using an inner-compass (conscience). Participants spoke of the importance of having a clear code of values and ethics to guide their choices and actions. Discernment also means to be able to listen to and follow one's inner-truth, using an inner-compass.

Listening to the inner BS meter, that small voice inside that says "Is this truth or not? Do you act on it or not?" That is the inner BS meter. (Jewish participant)

Remember you are in God's presence all the time....Could I do something to pick up that dollar bill that's lying there? Or the equivalent and I just really can't do it because I know God is a witness to whatever I do. And so my mind does come up with all those how could I cut corners and whatever comes up, it's like "Well I can't. How could I do that?" There is a voice in my head that says "how could you do that in front of God?" (Islamic participant)

Discernment for me is about allowing the wisdom of the body to speak with and through the power and faculty of the mind. So it's not just a certain kind of intellectual rational discernment that's made, "this is right, this is wrong; or this is good, this is bad." It's from a much deeper place of knowing that's connected to essence, and therefore to divinity. And it comes through the vehicle of the body, through the filter, as it were, of the mind and the intellect. And from that place discernment is full, rich, holistic, and capable of providing gateways to truth, experiences of truth, beauty, goodness, and revelations of the divine.

(Earth-based participant)

*Integrity (54)*. Integrity is being and acting authentically, responsibly, and with alignment to one's values. Participants often spoke of the importance of aligning one's being and actions with values and truth. Whereas discernment refers to the ability to tune into one's inner compass, integrity refers to the ability to manifest this truth by aligning one's actions with this inner-knowing. Participants also often mentioned authenticity, responsible action, and activism, as reflective of integration and alignment.

It took me all my life to integrate my spiritual being and this body, mind and feelings, integrate the two. So my body-mind-feeling is now doing what my soul really wants to do. So I feel very aligned with my destiny, with my soul's purpose....As I grow spiritually, it becomes my natural self. (Hindu participant)

I have never been comfortable in jobs that either are just there to get paid or have kind of ethical or moral values that don't appear in concert. (Yoga participant)

Truth, which I think is very related to integrity, which I have noticed that I have become increasingly honest with myself and others with a willingness to let the truth be told and kind of trust and the unfolding that comes from that. (Non-dual participant)

Empathy and sanity, those two together, not either one. Sanity without empathy is insane.

Empathy without sanity isn't useful. So those two entwined are activism and reflection, and they have to be together. Activism without reflection is dangerous, reflection without activism is useless. (Earth-based participant)

Table 1 summarizes the instances of each major theme and its sub-themes across participants in each tradition. These themes appear to be consistent with the teachings of most spiritual traditions. They were espoused by participants from all the represented traditions, with two exceptions:

1. Some of the Non-dual participants objected to the wording of themes that implied personal agency but agreed that these qualities spontaneously arise with spiritual maturity or self-realization. As one Non-dual participant said "When we do awaken to our true nature those qualities spontaneously arise and manifest in our lives and that's been my experience too."
2. A few Buddhists objected to the qualities of hope and faith as aspects of SI because they associated them with the effort to escape from reality. Regardless, most Buddhists and participants agreed with the quality and theme of trust.

In addition to the qualitative analysis of the interviews presented here, parallel work by Amram and Dryer (2007) focused on the development and validation of the Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) built from these themes. Preliminary research has shown the ISIS to be a reliable and valid ecumenical measure of SI. It contains 5 main domain scales and 22 capability sub-scales that have operationalized and corroborated many of the dimensions of SI discussed earlier. The 5 ISIS domains are Meaning, Consciousness, Grace, Transcendence, and Truth. The 22 capability subscales are Beauty, Discernment, Egolessness, Equanimity, Freedom, Gratitude, Higher-self, Holism, Immanence, Inner-wholeness, Intuition, Joy, Mindfulness, Openness, Practice, Presence, Purpose, Relatedness, Sacredness, Service, Synthesis, and Trust. While



showing some small differences in the clustering of specific abilities, the five ISIS domains closely parallel the first five qualitative themes presented earlier. And the qualities related to sixth theme, including peacefulness, equanimity, and egolessness, are included and clustered within the ISIS Truth domain. Similarly, qualities related to the seventh theme of inner-directedness, such as freedom and discernment, clustered within the ISIS Grace domain. ISIS predicted satisfaction with life, even when controlling for existing measures of spirituality, with which it also correlated. As ISIS showed satisfactory reliability (alpha greater than 0.95) and construct validity, it complements and further validates the qualitative grounded theory model of spiritual intelligence outlined above.

### Discussion

In contrast to the perennial philosophy (Huxely, 1945; Smith, 1987; Wilber, 1975, 2000) that presupposes a unifying cosmology across spiritual traditions, an ecumenical theory of SI does not necessitate such a unified cosmology; it does suggest that most spiritual traditions cultivate a universal set of qualities that are adaptive, that is, increase functioning and wellbeing. For example, a Christian may align with the sacred through Jesus, while a Jew may do so through the scrolls of the Torah, and the Shaman by sitting under a tree. But the capacity to align with the sacred may be universally adaptive, that is, spiritually intelligent.

In fact, participants in this study regularly applied their spiritual intelligence abilities to solve specific problems by tapping into particular SI capabilities such as using their intuition, transcending linear thinking through synthesis of paradoxes, or by taking a global systems perspective to solve problems more holistically. In addition to solving specific problems, participants in this study discussed how spiritual intelligence can be applied in every moment of daily life to experience greater meaning and wellbeing by practicing qualities such as mindfulness, presence, and compassion, even in the face of pain and suffering. In this regard, an

ecumenical theory of spiritual intelligence holds an expanded view of human potential. In this view, people are capable of experiencing existential meaning, developing refined consciousness, living in grace, love and reverence for life, being curious and open to truth, and attaining peacefulness, wholeness, and inner-directed freedom.

Indeed, modern research has corroborated the adaptive value and the contribution to wellbeing of many of these themes and qualities of spiritual intelligence. For example, sense of purpose and meaning (Fry, 2000), mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003), intuition (Agor, 1989; McCutcheon & Pincombe, 2001), gratitude (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), trust (Erikson, 1997; Omodei & McLennan, 2000), optimism (Leung, Moneta, & McBride-Chang, 2005), hope (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006), self-acceptance (MacInnes, 2006), self-compassion (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007), empathy (Shanafelt et al. 2005), compassion (Cassell, 2002), forgiveness (Krause & Ellison, 2003; Luskin 1999), humility (Boyd-Wilson, Walkey, & McClure, 2004; Tangney, 2002), and inner-directedness or internal locus of control (Elfstrom & Kreuter, 2006) have all been shown to contribute to functioning and wellbeing.

Furthermore, some of these qualities and abilities have been shown to have a biological basis, which is one of Gardner's (1999) criteria for including a set of abilities under the rubric of intelligence. For example, holistic thinking and intuition have been associated with the right neocortical hemisphere (Deutsch & Springer, 1997; Ornstein, 1998; Power & Lundsten, 1997). Similarly, mindfulness (Davidson et al., 2003; Lazar et al., 2005), compassion and loving-kindness (Lutz, Greischar, Rawlings, Ricard, & Davidson 2004), and empathy (Gallese, 2003; Seitz, Nickel, & Azari, 2006) have been shown to be associated with specialized regions in the brain. Self-transcendence has been shown to have a significant genetic contribution (Hamer, 2004; Kirk, Eaves, & Martin, 1999). These findings suggest a link between SI abilities and qualities, such as self-transcendence, holistic thinking, intuition, empathy, compassion, loving-

kindness, and mindfulness and their biological bases, including association with specialized processing subsystems in the brain and genetic evolutionary plausibility. Hence, these findings further support including these qualities and abilities under the rubric of intelligence.

A limitation in this study was the method used to select interview participants, which may have biased the resulting model of SI. While an effort was made to include participants across all the major traditions, the sample was biased, beginning with a convenience sample of people whom the author had ready access to. Follow-on snowball sampling expanded the sample but started from this biased set. Hence, most of the interviewees resided in the Northern California region of the US, and no further effort was made to represent all the diversity of views on spiritual intelligence from around the world. Furthermore, coding of the transcripts was done by a single coder, the author himself, which may have introduced further bias into the results.

In conclusion, this research has uncovered seven dimensions of spiritual intelligence, which appear to be valued and cultivated across most spiritual traditions. Future studies are required to validate this model of SI with more diverse populations; its predictive validity might be examined using a scale built from these dimensions of spiritual intelligence.

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Table 1: *Major Themes and Sub-Themes Presented by Participants from each Tradition N=71*

Theme	Bud <sup>a</sup>	Chr <sup>b</sup>	Int <sup>c</sup>	Hin <sup>d</sup>	Isl <sup>e</sup>	Jew <sup>f</sup>	ND <sup>g</sup>	Tao <sup>h</sup>	Yog <sup>i</sup>	Ear <sup>j</sup>	Total
Consciousness	7	7	20	5	5	7	5	4	5	6	71
Transrational	3	7	16	4	4	4	5	4	4	6	57
Mindfulness	7	7	20	5	4	6	5	4	5	6	69
Practice	7	7	18	5	5	7	5	4	5	6	69
Grace	7	7	19	5	5	7	5	4	5	6	70
Sacred	5	7	17	4	5	7	3	2	5	5	60
Love	7	7	15	5	4	7	5	4	5	6	65
Trust	6	7	14	4	5	5	5	2	5	6	59
Meaning	7	7	18	5	5	6	5	4	5	6	68
Transcendence	7	7	20	5	5	7	5	4	5	6	71
Holism	7	7	17	3	5	5	5	3	3	6	61
I-Thou	7	7	20	5	5	7	4	4	5	6	70
Truth	6	7	20	5	5	7	5	4	5	6	70
Acceptance	6	7	18	4	5	7	5	3	5	6	66
Openness	6	7	18	5	5	5	3	4	4	6	63
Serenity	7	7	20	5	5	7	5	4	5	6	71
Peacefulness	7	7	20	5	5	7	4	3	5	6	69
Egolessness	7	7	17	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	63
Inner-Directedness	7	7	20	4	5	6	5	4	5	6	69
Freedom	7	7	20	3	4	4	5	4	5	6	65
Discernment	5	7	17	4	5	5	2	3	4	6	58
Integrity	6	7	15	3	5	5	4	3	5	6	59
Total Participants	7	7	20	5	5	7	5	4	5	6	71

<sup>a</sup>Buddhist, <sup>b</sup>Christian, <sup>c</sup>Integrative, <sup>d</sup>Hindu, <sup>e</sup>Islamic, <sup>f</sup>Jewish, <sup>g</sup>Non-dual, <sup>h</sup>Taoist, <sup>i</sup>Yogi, <sup>j</sup>Earth-Based