

A lush tropical forest scene with various green plants and trees. On the right side, there is a golden, ornate shrine or altar structure. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

HOW SPIRITUALITY  
SUPPORTS

*Health &  
Wellness*

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Spirituality has been defined as 'the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, the self, to others, to nature and the significant or sacred' (1).

Much research surrounds the importance of spirituality in the human experience particularly related to illness and health. It is documented that the loss of one's health or that of a loved one often results in a questioning of life's deeper meaning, choices, and repercussions of one's past (2).

*Both religious and spiritual teachings can guide new understandings when faced with challenges and bring ease to much suffering (3).*

A systematic review which included 14 studies examining the differences in psychological distress between nonbelievers and believers or those with a strong spiritual identity, found that the greater level of certainty in one's belief systems, the greater the psychological health. One of the main stressors in non-believers being 'negative perceptions by others', relating to distress associated with 'what other people think of them or their actions' (4).

Whilst organised religious theology is generally passed down as the 'true word' in like-minded communities, spirituality is more of a dynamic process incorporating one's relationship to their lived experience. In the modern world today, more people see themselves as spiritual rather than religious (2).

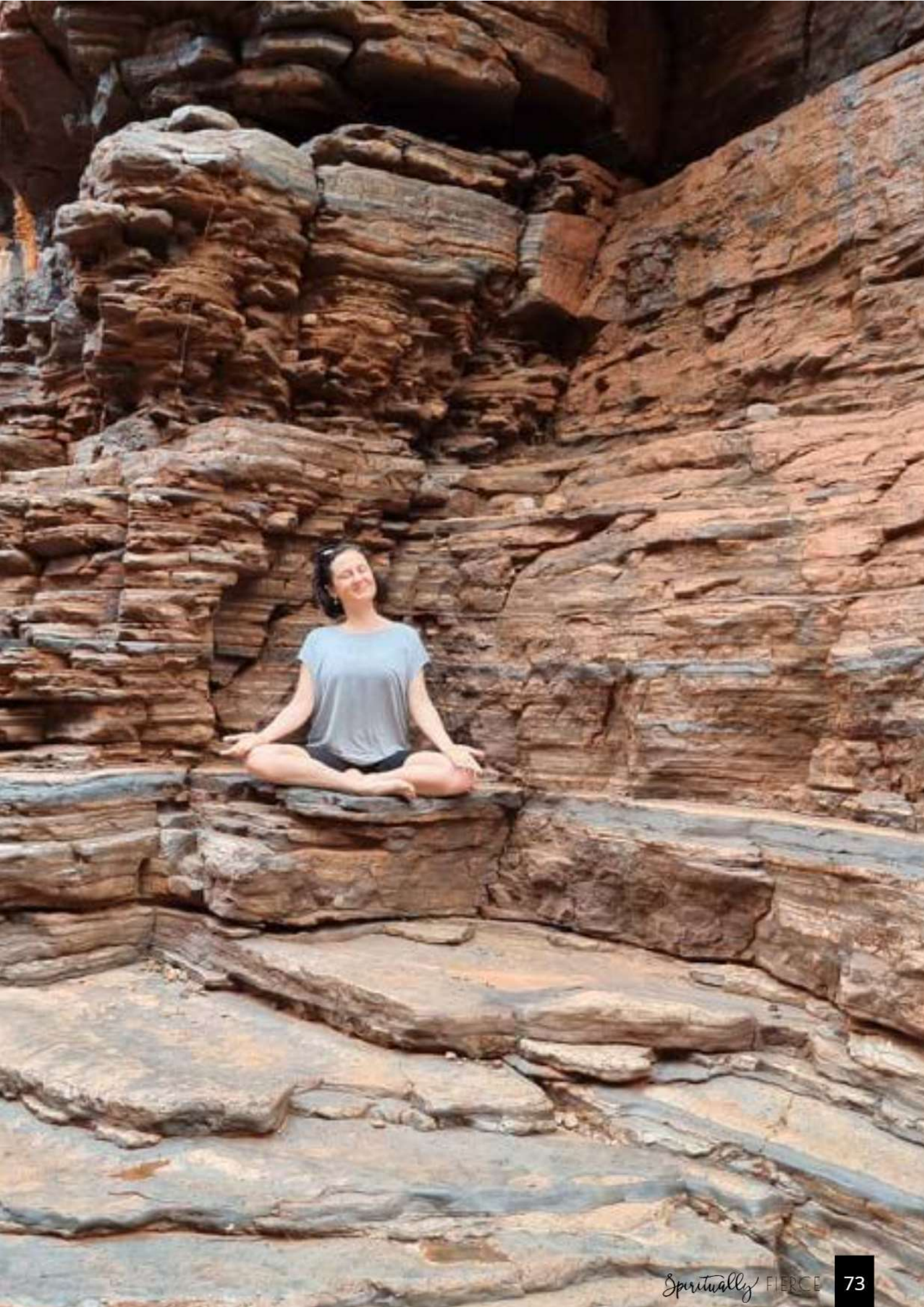
Certain interpersonal correlates within the constructs of religiousness or spirituality may enhance or undermine health and emotional adjustment. Studies have demonstrated that factors such as gratitude and compassion which enhance positive relationships, have beneficial outcomes such as less conflict, less loneliness, and higher social support. In contrast, extrinsic religiousness that emphasises a punishing God was found to be related to more of a hostile interpersonal style (5).

In another study, that included 898 college students aged 17-26 years, researchers found that factors such as connection to religion, spiritual maturity, and self-transcendence to be significantly correlated to better mental health and positive functioning. More specifically, lower levels of anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsiveness, and higher levels of self-esteem, self-approval, identity integration and meaning in life. Conversely, perfectionism, shame, and eating disorders were not associated (6).

*Forgiveness of the self and forgiveness of others are two factors that appear to correlate with health, with forgiveness of the self, being documented to be relatively more important to health-related outcomes (7).*

A meta-analysis of more than 850 studies looking at the relationship between religious/ spiritual









involvement and aspects of mental health, found the majority of studies concluding that having spiritual beliefs resulted in better mental health and adaptability to stress (8). Another analysis of 350 studies noted that religious/spiritual people are physically healthier, lead healthier lifestyles, and require fewer health services (9).

Earlier research was done mainly on religiosity, which also includes spiritual beliefs. Along with a lower risk of mental health issues and improved recovery, most available evidence reported a reduced likelihood of disease and better remission in many physical health conditions such as heart disease and hypertension, emphysema, cirrhosis and other liver diseases. Religious beliefs are also correlated to longevity related to all-cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, and cancer (10).

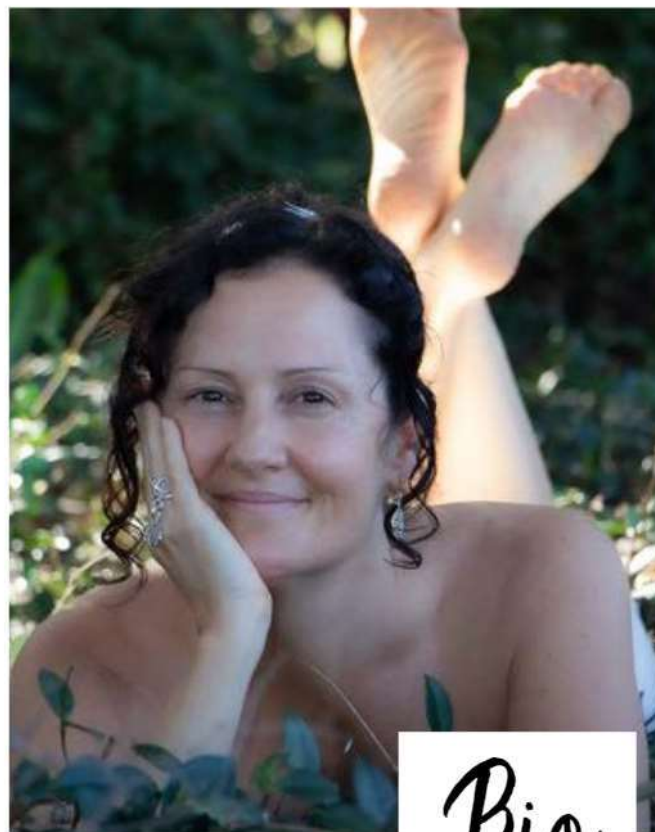
Since the beginning of this century, there has been a renewal in interest in the role of spirituality in health and healing, with over 2000 research papers published in medical journals (11). Despite the recognition of the importance of spirituality in health, much of the Western allopathic view of health continues to remain split in the Cartesian dualistic view which separates the physical from the spiritual (12).

### References

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## Bio

Dr Niikee has trained as a traditional naturopath and energy medicine practitioner since 1992 and as an academic teacher and researcher since 2006.

By combining clinical medicine knowledge with traditional wisdom, metaphysics and quantum, Dr Niikee has supported hundreds of her clients and students to be able to recognise the deeper underlying causes to health issues and other imbalances in their minds and lives.

With vast and diverse skill sets, extensive experience and heart centred approach, Dr Niikee facilitates and empowers the transformation of any barriers to one's best life. Her mission is to create a community charity so that there is a wider choice of health education and support options available to all.

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