

The  
Bishop's  
Action  
Foundation



# **SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING**

A part of cultural well-being

for older New Zealanders  
Te taha whanau

by

Penny Eames

With support from Simon Cayley

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***Belief systems provide individuals with a foundation for understanding why particular events occur and determine how they cope with these situations.***<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ho, E , & Cooper J (May 2007)

## Table of content

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>4</b>
RELEVANCE OF SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING .....	5
SPIRITUALITY AS A SENSE OF AWE AND WONDER .....	6
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>3. FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>15</b>
3.1 OVERVIEW .....	15
3.2 LITERATURE SEARCH.....	18
3.3 WHAT DID THE OLDER NEW ZEALANDERS BELIEVE?.....	22
<i>a. Spirituality – what does the word mean to you?</i> .....	22
<i>b. Do you believe in a God or Higher Being?</i> .....	26
<i>c. Creator, creation and evolution</i> .....	29
<i>d. Angels/guardians/tupuna/ghosts</i> .....	31
<i>e. Superstitions</i> .....	34
<i>f. Codes of Behaviour</i> .....	36
3.4 COPING AND CRISIS SITUATIONS .....	39
3.5 RELIGION: DO YOU BELONG?.....	45
3.6 IDENTITY/SELF ESTEEM/UNIQUE .....	46
3.7 SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES .....	48
3.8 ROLE OF CEREMONIES IN SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING.....	51
3.9. OTHER FINDINGS.....	53
<i>a. Activities – walking by the water, climbing hills and enjoying the environment.</i> .....	53
<i>b. Music and poetry</i> .....	54
<i>c. Finding a reason for the unexplained</i> .....	54
<b>4.RECOMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>56</b>
4.1 GREATER AWARENESS OF SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING .....	56
4.2 CELEBRATION OF SPIRITUALITY .....	56
4.3 "SECULAR" INCLUDING A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION IN LIVES .....	56
4.4 ONGOING RESEARCH ON SPIRITUALITY .....	56
4.5 A TOOL KIT PRODUCED EXPLAINING SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING .....	56
4.6 DISCUSSION ENCOURAGED REGARDING THE FINDINGS OF THIS RESEARCH.....	56
4.7 SPIRITUALITY AS A POSITIVE PART OF OUR WELLBEING.....	56
4.8 SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT .....	57
4.9 ARTS ENGAGEMENT AS AUDIENCE AND PARTICIPANT AS PART OF SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING.....	57
4.10 ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN TIMES OF STRESS .....	57
<b>APPENDIX I – QUESTIONNAIRE</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>APPENDIX II – GLOSSARY</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>APPENDIX III– REFERENCES, BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEB REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>APPENDIX IV– DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS</b> .....	<b>63</b>

## Executive Summary

*"The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only, I am a devoutly religious [spiritual] man." (Einstein)*

The challenge for a society that appears to see itself as largely secular is to work out how it can encourage exploration of spiritual well-being in a manner that encourages debate and supports people to acknowledge the importance of a spiritual dimension to life without the discussion being limited to a focus on religion or being diverted by dogmatic positions.

The participants in this research were enthusiastic about discussing the words 'spiritual or spirituality.' This enthusiasm led the researchers to the conclusion that the words should not be treated as 'taboo' in society generally, and there should not be a fear of using the words in social policy and practices of government, within community organisations, the media, schools and organised religion. Most of the 40 older adults interviewed and the 10 older adults also took part in a focus group, welcomed and really enjoyed having a chance to discuss spirituality and what the concept meant to them.

More than half of the interviewees had previously taken part in discussion groups looking at belief systems, particularly those in Taranaki and Waikato. Taking part in the interview gave them an opportunity to tell stories and relay experiences that they had either kept to themselves or felt that society on the whole didn't really want to know about. Many also saw themselves as "spiritual beings", having a spiritual dimension that needed to be nurtured and understood.

Spirituality was interpreted differently by participants in the research. For some it was their relationship with God, spirits, ghosts, angels or guardians (tupuna), for others spirituality was associated with superstition. For a third group spirituality was also associated with their times of meditation, prayer or other actions including taking part in the arts, listening to music, gardening or walking on the beach.

Having an outlet through which a person could express spiritual feelings and emotions was also important and this was occasionally referred to being in a place, but more often it was a way of life.

80% of the interviewees noted an important separation, between religion and spirituality. While religion provided a way to express their spirituality – it was seen as an organised expression. Non-formal expressions of spirituality were seen as equally important and for many of the participants far more important. Spirituality was to them a personal expression of some inner being.

This separation between spirituality and religion was more pronounced in Pakeha New Zealanders and people from Christian backgrounds. Those who found their religion most supportive were from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds, or were interviewees who associated with the Pacific Island Churches. Maori interviewees

expressed a mix of views, several finding their organised religion supportive, but others expressing doubts and disillusionment about their experiences of religion.

What was found was that many people used forms of prayer and meditation to give themselves strength in times of stress, but equally useful were mechanisms that involved writing lists, listening to music, and walking on the beach (or in the bush or countryside). People who used prayers and mantras did not necessarily identify with belonging to a particular religion. However, for some of the sample, belonging to a formal religious group was an essential part of their culture; the religion providing them with a sense of belonging, a foundation for their lives and a community within which to operate.

For many interviewees, religion was extremely important. Of those who belonged to a particular organised religious group and who attended religious ceremonies, most considered that their spiritual well-being was being nurtured and supported by the rituals of those religions.

For a quarter of the participants, spiritual well-being was catered for through music, poetry, or occasional journal writing, which provided a means of expression. In 6% of participants, this creative expression was achieved within a group (particularly a choir or an orchestra), but more often it was a solo exercise. For some interviewees, a sense of spiritual well-being was reached through an awe of nature, beauty and the environment, and these interviewees sought out positive experiences in the natural environment to enable them to cope in times of crisis.

Most of the interviewees acknowledged that there were "supernatural things" that couldn't be explained. Most interviewees had undergone "spiritual experiences" in their old age, but had simply accepted them as part of their lives and well-being.

### **Relevance of spiritual well-being**

We should note that, if spiritual well-being is part of our cultural well-being and if we continue to talk about the importance of 'intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being', we need to do more research to understand how our society deals with the part of us that is called 'spiritual'. There was only one interviewee who didn't acknowledge that there was a spiritual dimension to his/ her life. This spiritual dimension was expressed in different ways by 80% of the interviewees.

What we found was that older people are just as likely or unlikely to cope in times of crisis, but most had acquired a set of skills to help them cope, and these included ways to provide themselves with tools that enabled them to have a sense of "spiritual well-being" – a calmness that incorporates being at one with themselves, their community and, for some, their God.

What was also interesting was the way many of the interviewee's relied on the environment and music to enable them to achieve this sense of spiritual well-being. This reliance appeared to have come later in life through learning to "feel and look" at the environment, and to consider both the environment and music as soothing. The interviewees showed us that they used their spiritual well-being which can be secular and can involve an awe of the environment, the sea, looking at nature and participating in the arts and music.

The questions we didn't answer were:

- a) How do the older people use their belief systems in times of stress?
- b) Did the tuition our older people got as children within churches, temples and mosques, at boy scouts and girl guides, with religious parents and grand parents make them resilient?
- c) Can we learn anything from these older people that can enable us to support younger people cope with their stress?

### **Spirituality as a sense of awe and wonder**

Any recommendations for action as a result of this research should take note of the way our older New Zealanders:

- a) see the environment as being awesome and a thing of great beauty comfort and spiritual well-being;
- b) experience awe, wonder and peace through music and beautiful words in poetry and in walking on beaches and in the bush;
- c) seek out 'magic and beautiful experiences' by visiting places of historical significance and by being given opportunities to see beautiful visual art;
- d) know how to pause and reflect – to say a mantra, recite a prayer or to meditate. Even some of those individuals who did not believe in God used the skills of prayer and meditation when in stress. These mantras and reflective mechanisms provided a useful tool for contemplation and for coping with stressful situation;
- e) link the "wow" factor of music and the arts generally and the wonders of nature with spirituality – sunsets, waves and the sky were significant to many interviewees, and demonstrated that although many of our interviewees did not subscribe to a particular religion, they did believe that their spiritual well-being was important and was supported in other ways.

Interviewees generally acknowledged that society should embrace spiritual well-being as part of our human nature. Many felt that we could give the nurturing of our spiritual side as much weight in our schools as "intellectual, emotional and physical well-being", with emphasis placed on a need to nurture that '*something about us we don't understand*'. A programme teaching skills for spiritual well-being could enable young people to learn from the experiences of those older New Zealanders who see themselves as having achieved balance in their lives, with spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical well-being all being part of their cultural well-being, their feelings of community, their way of living and their style of communication.

## 1. Introduction

In 2002, the Local Government Act was passed in New Zealand, defining the purpose of local government as being *"to promote social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being in the present and in the future"*.<sup>2</sup> Many people, both within local government and within the broader community, find it hard to understand what was meant by 'cultural well-being' and how it related to their long term community plans.

While there has been a reluctance to define the word 'culture' in terms of the Local Government Act, there has also been an acceptance that the word doesn't mean 'the development or fostering of the arts'. They recognised that they needed to be aware that their communities are made up of a large number of cultures, all of which have different needs and ways of working and living. Increasingly, the UNESCO definition has been used to support this local government purpose:

*...culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and...it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.*<sup>3</sup>

The Foundation notes that UNESCO includes in this definition the words **spiritual** and **beliefs**. We consider that extra work needs to be done to enable us to understand the meaning of these words in the context of both the Local Government Act and how our societies operate in general. Like the Commonwealth Foundation, we needed to ask:

*"Why the turn to culture? – One of the first things we must do in addressing this issue ... is to ask the question why the interest in culture now. One can link the rise in interest to the failure of development theories to explain persistent poverty and hunger in the majority of the world's countries and the widening income gaps between the rich, now developed world and the poor under-developing works. In short, culture is being enlisted as a 'new' factor to explain the differences between regions and countries".*<sup>4</sup>

Since 2002, cultural outcomes in Local Government have been examined more widely in New Zealand. This is in line with current international thinking that, within our cultural awareness, there may be some keys to understanding how and why our societies work or don't work.

It was with this in mind that the Bishop's Action Foundation reference group for this study posed the question: What does the word 'spiritual' mean to people within our cultures in New Zealand? The Foundation decided to ask this question of older New Zealanders, and to also ask them about their lives and their belief systems in order to discover what meaning and importance the respondents gave to the spiritual part of their cultural well-being.

It was in this context that the Foundation set up this research project using one-on-one interviews with a wide range of older New Zealanders.

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<sup>2</sup> Local Government Act (2002)

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO (2001)

<sup>4</sup> Nurse, K (2007) Commonwealth Foundation

The research asked these older people whether they believed in God, Creation, superstition, angels, spirits, how they used prayer, meditation, how they coped with times of crisis, about "spiritual experiences", about ceremonies, and about religion.

Our challenge for The Bishop's Action Foundation reference group members was that we didn't feel we had sufficient general knowledge about the spiritual dimension people's lives generally – what this word meant or how or how people's beliefs and spiritual well-being, if these were relevant, influenced their behaviours.

The reference group believed they needed to gain a better understanding of any dimension of spiritual well-being as a component of cultural well-being and further how this should relate both to the Local Government purpose of promoting 'cultural well-being' and how it related to the lives of people in our societies.

The research team was also unclear about what extent spiritual belief systems influence the ways older New Zealanders operate in the world.

The question we had to ask ourselves was:

*"Are beliefs and spirituality an important part of culture and, if so, how do they influence ways of living in an increasingly secular society. Is there a way we can gain balance and well-being in our society and communities generally without the spiritual dimension?"*

The research team asked themselves the following questions:

*"What is spirituality and what do older people in New Zealand believe in?"*

*"Do these older people use their spiritual well-being to enable them to cope with stress?"*

The team also wished to know whether spiritual or religious teaching had given these older New Zealanders any kind of spiritual tools that would help them with an understanding of who they are – their identity. It was also hoped that these older New Zealanders could provide some guidance that can be shared with the education system so that their tools of resilience can be copied by other New Zealanders.

The answers to these questions could then be compared with future research on young people, including whether some young people are inventing their own forms of "spiritual well-being" through artificial highs, thrill seeking and drugs.

Voltaire stated: *"If there were no God it would be necessary to invent him."* This quotation may be true for younger people today. It may be that artificial stimulation and escapism, including binge drinking, drugs and anti-social behaviours, is filling the place of god in some young people's lives. The team knew that many older New Zealanders had received formal religious teaching as children and wondered if this teaching had given them tools to cope in times of crisis. Researching the spiritual well-being of young people would be a second stage of this research and then comparing them would be a way to increase our knowledge of what provides people generally with spiritual well-being.

The Foundation hopes in the future to ask whether there is a gap in spirituality and an absence of belief systems for young people, and whether such gaps (if they exist) have forced some young people to find some other mechanisms or tools to enable them to cope with stress. The team also intends to look at whether people who do not have a clearly defined spiritual belief system find other ways to

cope and be resilient in times of stress, loneliness or dislocation from their family's culture.

As will be seen in the findings of this research (Section 3), the older New Zealanders we interviewed had developed and embraced a diverse range of spiritual tools and spiritual understandings.

In addition to the above questions, the research team were conscious of the purposes of the 2002 Local Government Act and the community and social goals as articulated in the Ministry of Social Development's *Social Report 2007*.

*"New Zealanders share a strong national identity, have a sense of belonging and value cultural diversity. Everybody is able to pass their cultural traditions on to future generations. Māori culture is valued and protected."*<sup>5</sup>

*People enjoy constructive relationships with others in their families, whānau, communities, iwi and workplaces. Families support and nurture those in need of care. New Zealand is an inclusive society where people are able to access information and support".*<sup>6</sup>

While these social goals do not specifically identify ideologies or spiritual well-being, the research team felt that spiritual well-being may well enhance our society's greater understanding of the values and sense of belonging experienced by older adults. It was further hoped that this understanding of spiritual well-being in older adults would give the research team a picture of whether resilience in these older adults may be linked to spiritual well-being or belief systems, and how such links might be made.

The team hypothesized that an examination of culture, including its spiritual dimension, (whether a specific ethnic culture or the culture of the work place, a gang, or a senior citizens' organisation, for example) could lead to an understanding of what makes society and communities work. Just as importantly, it may also lead to an understanding of what creates the frictions, violence and the lack of peace, particularly between generational groups, but also in lower socio-economic parts of the country.

The Foundation's research aimed to discover, through in-depth interviews with a range of different older people, what they believe in and how these beliefs and the spirituality associated with them influences how they relate to others, their communities and their environment. Researchers asked the interviewees about their belief and experiences, including belief in self, belief in some kind of spirituality, superstition, supernatural events, environmental forces, codes of behaviour, and religions. The researchers then sought to link the answers to the way interviewees relate to each other in society generally, and to find how these older New Zealanders may have used their spirituality and the tools of spiritual awareness to enable them to cope with crisis situations.

The perceived benefit of this research for New Zealand society would, we hoped, would bring an understanding of how, or if, belief systems and spirituality contribute positively to our cultures, and whether that contribution provides

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2007). Refer to: *The Social Report 2007*, Indicators: Cultural Identity at [www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/introduction/indicators-for-social-report-2007](http://www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz/introduction/indicators-for-social-report-2007)

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2007). Refer to: *The Social Report 2007*, Indicators: Social Connectedness (see URL above)

individual members of society with resilience that assist them to be functioning members of their families, communities and society in times of stress.

During the process of intense, one-on-one interviews, the researchers did gain an insight into how a broad range of older New Zealanders understood their own spiritual well-being, the role of spirituality or belief systems in contributing to society generally, and in some cases how spirituality and belief systems provided them with a sense of identity, belonging and community.

## **Assumptions**

The research started with three assumptions that formed the basis of the research. They were that:

- a) *strong belief systems and spirituality enable people to be functional and positive members of their families, communities and society;*
- b) *well defined beliefs and some degree of spiritual awareness enable people to cope, providing a value base that (on the whole) supports functional behaviour and reinforces a person's sense of belonging and place; and*
- c) *belief systems provide tools for survival in stressful situations, enabling older people to be resilient in times of stress and providing skills to enable them to cope during crises.*

The Foundation notes that the researchers were not specifically looking for or at religion or the role churches, mosques, marae, temples, communities of worship, or how these organisations contribute generally to society. Religion was simply considered to be a structured expression of a belief system or ideology.

We also used a limited literature search to track trends in the discussions about the role of spirituality in society and if it contributes to making a peaceful society. During this literature research we noted a general trend summed up in the following quote.

*"... the fact still remains that it is not the most religious nations in our world today, but rather the most secular, that have been able to create the most civil, just, safe, equitable, humane, and prosperous societies. Denmark and Sweden stand out as shining examples. The German think tank the Hans-Böckler Stiftung recently ranked nations in terms of their success at establishing social justice within their societies; Denmark and Sweden, two of the least-religious nations in the world, tied for first. It is a great socio-religious irony— for lack of a better term— that when we consider the fundamental values and moral imperatives contained within the world's great religions, such as caring for the sick, the infirm, the elderly, the poor, the orphaned, the vulnerable; practicing mercy, charity, and goodwill toward one's fellow human beings; and fostering generosity, humility, honesty, and communal concern over individual egotism — those traditionally religious values are most successfully established, institutionalized, and put into practice at the societal level in the most irreligious nations in the world today".<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Zuckerman, P (2009)

Within the interviewees, those who considered themselves most secular, or emphasised that they didn't belong to any organised religion, often appeared to see themselves as spiritual; they certainly stressed the importance they placed on the values of respect, caring and good will towards others. They noted that they didn't think that organised religions had the monopoly on "traditional religious values"<sup>8</sup>. Their values could as several interviewees noted, be linked to their spiritual well-being.

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<sup>8</sup> Taranaki interviewee

## 2. Methodology

UNESCO defines culture as follows:

*"...culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and...it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs".<sup>9</sup>*

The Foundation started its research with this definition of culture, placing an emphasis on the inclusion in it of the words "spiritual and "beliefs".

The process chosen was to set up interviews with up to 50 older New Zealanders and through listening to their opinions, to canvas what these older people thought was the role of spiritual well-being in their lives and what they believed in generally.

For consistency, only one researcher from this older adult group would conduct these open ended discussions. The discussions would cover a wide range of topics associated with spirituality and religion and then draw conclusions about the role spirituality plays in their lives.

This was not to be an academic research process – it was to be a discussion with people, individuals who volunteered to talk about their belief systems. The group it was hoped would give insights that could give us an understanding of spiritual well-being and what this phrase means.

Through the interview process it was hoped to draw out themes, and link the interview research to current discussions, particularly those being held on the internet relating to the importance of values and belief systems.

*"...the paring of 'cultural identity and ideology' might seem an odd one, yoking together the new preoccupation with the old. In fact, however, there is a certain continuity between the contemporary discussion of identity and past work in Cultural Studies, which took theorising and analysing ideology as its central concern."<sup>10</sup>*

### **a. Literature and internet research**

This limited word search identified some of the existing research on spirituality that was linked to values, cultural identity and an understanding of the nature of belief systems and ideologies and viewed them as part of community interaction. A Google alert system was also set up to provide ongoing links to articles being published on spiritual well-being and spiritual research being published on the net.

A questionnaire was drafted using some of the identified research that had taken place in recent times and published on the web.

### **b. A pilot group was identified to test questionnaire.**

Five older people in the Wellington and Kapiti Coast from diverse ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic communities were selected to pilot the first draft of the questionnaire. These five people were chosen to provide diversity, but also to see how the questions stimulated discussion. After this the questionnaire was

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<sup>9</sup> UNESCO (2001)

<sup>10</sup> Hammond P. (1996)

modified and accepted by the reference group for the remaining interviews. The questionnaire is attached Appendix I.

### **c. Interviews**

Qualitative interviews were then carried out with 40 Older New Zealanders. Each of these 40 interviews was carried out on a one-to-one basis. The interviewer was from the same age group as the older people who were to be the interview subjects. A focus group of 10 Pacific Island Christians was also held. The ages of those attending this focus group were not collected, but they were elders in the church and certainly mature adults.

The questionnaire was used more as a prompt and as the older adults talked about themselves their discussions were wide ranging and covered their life experiences generally. They sometimes answered questions out of order and with short disconnected statements. Often their answers were what could be called 'musing' or 'thinking aloud.' Lots of the comments were closer to being open-ended statements. Almost all were anecdotal in nature. There was one exception to the one-to-one interview format and that was with the Pacific Island Presbyterian Church and their Minister who had set up the focus group which he also conducted. All attending appeared to be over 50 years, with a mix of men and women. Some were a group from the Cook Island Aitutaki who were visiting their church at the time we had set aside to conduct the interviews.

Initially it was hoped that interviewees could be chosen at random from addresses in the telephone books in Wellington, Taranaki and Waikato, but during the pilot interviews it was found that older people were reluctant to talk to a total stranger without some introduction. Therefore, interviews were set up on a referral basis, and with contacts who identified themselves as wishing to discuss 'spiritual matters' to cover the widest possible cross-section of older New Zealanders. The challenge of this was that at least 50% of the sample had spent a significant amount of time thinking, writing or talking about their belief systems either because of their religion or because they belonged to structured 'belief' discussion groups. To create a balance and more breadth and diversity the researchers asked some of those already interviewed to suggest people for interviews and both the Bishop's Action Foundation staff and staff and volunteers of Waikato Arts in Action identified people from a significant number of ethnic groups, religious backgrounds, regions, and views to add to the richness of this research project. In Wellington and Taranaki older adults provided the research team with suggestions and these contacts enabled the researcher to fill gaps in socio-economic circumstance, ethnic and religious backgrounds and also provided some of the oldest of the interviewees from a couple of retirement villages. In the end, although those interviewed were almost all people who wanted to talk about spirituality, had thought about the topic or who belonged to established religions, they did provide a wide range of opinions and vastly different answers to the questions.

Also it could be noted that at least 12% had lived through the Second World War. Many had had partners who had died and there was a mix of people who had children and grandchildren and those who were single, divorced and were married or been married. The same also included several older people with disabilities including one of the most articulate interviewees had been totally blind from birth.

The interviews were conducted in a range of settings, including people's own homes, state and council houses, supported housing flats, retirement villages, a café, a library, and, in several cases, church buildings.

#### **d. Analysis.**

The analysis in this research was based on the one-to-one interview material and from the transcribing of the interviews, most of which were electronically recorded. The quotes and answers to the questions were transcribed onto an excel spreadsheet. Many of the statements were disconnected sentences – spoken language, and could be called 'mini sentences.' They are expressive and conveyed opinions and they are analysed according to different categories accordingly. These short 'mini sentences' are recorded in full as part of the analysis to convey what was a thinking process by the interviewees. Example of this is seen particularly when we were discussing the word "spiritual". Two of the interviewees just says "It is the spark – the [pause] the spark - you know, the spark ....that is what spirituality is" Sometimes these one line statements were as expressive as those who provided an essay – both the single words and the sentences were treated as valuable and are included in the analysis.

Several of the interviewees sent me letters or emails shortly after their interviews. These were two cases in answer to the question about "a spiritual moment". Those written answers were included. The interview, with an older Muslim women, resulted in a letter describing her trip to Mecca and extracts of that letter have been included as if they were part of the original interview. Where the interviewee asked for the interview not to be recorded, notes were transcribed immediately after the interview was completed and added to the analysis sheets. They had given permission for these notes to be included in the analysis, but no quotations were repeated from these interviews.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Overview

Between July 2008 and December 2008 the Foundation conducted interviews to ask older New Zealanders between the ages of 55 and 89 years to discuss **spiritual well-being** and what influence spiritual well-being has and had on their lives. It was hoped to find out what older people believed in and how important 'spiritual matters' were to them.

Before conducting one-on-one interviews, a limited literature and internet search examined current and previous research into spiritual belief systems. Most of the research papers examined covered themes associated with spirituality and identity and what people believed in. We didn't find any that were particularly linked with older people and none that linked spiritual well-being with behaviour and people's ability or not to cope in times of crisis. We had also hoped to find research that had been qualitative rather than quantitative and we didn't find any. All the research had involved percentages of people who believed in God, spirits and superstitions. There were a number of these – some covering large samples of young people or people who had responded to questionnaires on the internet.

The interviews were our focus and the findings showed that 90% those interviewed:

- a. were clear about what the word "spiritual" meant to them;
- b. wanted to talk about their spiritual experiences and well-being;
- c. were articulate about what they saw as the meaning and adaptation of spiritual well-being and keen to share their belief systems and what they meant for their well-being;
- d. were enthusiastic about doing more research and sharing that research with the interviewer
- e. thought the word "spiritual" was a positive word that should be used more often to describe situations in their lives.

Only one of the people interviewed questioned the purpose of the interviews and saw no relevance in "spiritual well-being"- discounting it as "emotional prop, related to people's mood swings."

All the other interviewees appeared to be comfortable and were keen to talk about their lives and their spirituality. This participatory research methodology resulted in the interviews being wide ranging and resulted in open and honest responses.

The interview findings showed that there are a variety of ways in which the older New Zealanders interviewed related to what they saw as their God or gods, higher beings, angels, tupuna, guardians, the environment and the arts. They also had different experiences of religious teachings and experiences received while they were children and whether these experiences were positive or negative.

Many of the individuals interviewed used prayer, meditation or mantra to calm them down or provide support in times of stress, but just as many used physical or mental activity including walking, running or looking at the sea, waves, mountains, the country, lakes or rivers. Some also turned to the arts, sport or gardening. Particularly mentioned were listening or playing music, writing poetry, journals or short stories, less frequently enjoying or participating in visual arts,

gardening, cooking and playing sport, particularly golf. For other people there was a need to connect and talk, to just be with partners, their communities, families and friends.

A number (about one third) of interviewees were superstitious. A number of those interviewed had had what could broadly be called "spiritual experiences", including guidance (from an angel, guardian, spirit or God), help to do something that was perceived as impossible, or an unexplained answer to a prayer or positive thoughts.

The ways in which the interviewees coped with stress varied and included:

- a. using prayer, meditation and reciting mantra;
- b. walking on the beach, in the country or climbing a hill;
- c. listening to or playing music or writing poetry;
- d. just getting on with it – sorting the problem out by themselves;
- e. seeking and getting support from family or friends.

Only a few said they didn't cope and turned to drugs or alcohol to dull the pain.

Almost all of the interviewees had experienced tragedies in their lives and had life experiences that were consistent with their age. Most had got through those tragedies, and in their words had "moved on"<sup>11</sup>. Interviewees who had experienced the First World War in England and Europe imparted some of the more colourful experiences, which they saw as enriching their lives.

Most interviewees had received considerable "moral teaching" during their childhoods, particularly associated with family, but also associated with strong links to a religion, church school or college, devout parent, grand parent, priest or religious organisation – most often a church, synagogue or temple. 15% of interviewees mentioned the influence of a parent, or more often a grand parent on their lives and the development of their belief systems.

Codes of behaviour that were formulated during childhood appeared to be significant, with many interviewees discussing how their parents, grandparents and the church or a religious upbringing had influenced their lives. Also of interest were the number of interviewees who reported the influence of organisations like the Boy Scouts, Junior Chamber of Commerce (JCs), Boys Brigade, Girl Guides, Sunday Schools, and how the religious teaching that they had had from priests and during the preparation for various ceremonies like Christian confirmation and Jewish Bar Mitzvah had influenced their lives. These experiences had enabled them to formulate their codes of behaviour, instilling such values as respect for others, caring for people less fortunate than themselves and 'the ten commandments'.

Many interviewees identified a grandparent as the person who gave them the most spiritual teaching as they grew up.

One finding was that 34% of the interviewees had stopped attending the Christian churches that had been part of their childhood. These interviewees usually still believed in God, but were seeking other ways to express what they saw as their spirituality. Some suggesting that they could express this spiritual well-being through the arts (particularly music and writing poetry) while others associated spirituality with the calm and awe they felt just being or walking on a beach or

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<sup>11</sup> Taranaki Interviewee

looking at the environment. Spirituality was more often associated, for these non church attendees, with the arts (particularly music and poetry) or with the environment (particularly walking in the bush or alongside water – the sea, a lake, a river, or waves).

This spiritual well-being gained from the environment and the arts was also expressed by those interviewees who said they did not believe in God or a Higher Being. They had a clear definition of spirituality and 10% of interviewees had what they considered to be “spiritual experiences”. Their spiritual experiences were most often linked to the environment or the arts, particularly music or writing and associated with beauty, but in two cases associated with what appeared to be an intervention in their lives from a guardian or tupuna.

*“On a personal level - I can be moved to tears by great music. [pause] I can be thrown by the insights of human genius, great composers, and great thinkers. The word creative is part of a process like evolution. [pause] Even the simple bacterium communicates and cooperates to make a simple design. This goes on higher and higher up the scale. [pause] The fungi, they join together and become an organisation. Higher and higher up the scale until we get to human beings and we can behave like a lot of tribes or like a large organisation. This is a spiritual thing”<sup>12</sup>*

As a prompt, interviewees were asked if the word spirituality was positive. Only two of those interviewed said no, at least 60% of the others were enthusiastic in their affirmations *“oh yes very positive”*. Of the two exceptions, one interviewee said the word had been distorted by religion and *“the way religion controls lives”<sup>13</sup>*, and the other associated the word with the devil as well as God.

There were times when the person interviewed became particularly animated. These times were when they were telling stories of experiences and describing events in their lives, particularly events overseas – during travel or during the war. Some of those interviewed became emotional in a – there were tears and the tape was turned off on several occasions. These experiences were so personal that, correctly, they are not recorded in the findings, but they demonstrated that talking about “spiritual well-being” was very significant experience for many of the older people interviewed.

The only time interviewees expressed any negativity was when asked questions about the word religion. This negativity, and for 12% of interviewees that negativity can be described as anger, was intense. the interviewees discussed these negative experiences, all associated with an established church<sup>14</sup> they had belonged to in the earlier parts of their lives and the way they had been treated by the elders, clergy and priests and workers of these churches. These negative experiences had related particularly to attitudes to birth control, homosexual relationship, the role of women and divorce. In two of the examples it also had to do with employment issues related by clergy interviewees, who had left church ministry. One interviewee also discussed the church’s processes associated with what she called “truth and reconciliation” meetings where church ministers and those she called their victims, discussed abuses that had happened before 1980’s.

<sup>12</sup> An interviewee who said he didn’t believe in a God or Higher Being

<sup>13</sup> Interviewee from Kapiti Coast

<sup>14</sup> These negative experiences related mainly to several Roman Catholic Women, but were also associated with Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist and Methodist ministries.

For three of the interviewees, these negative issues around church attitudes had not been resolved, and the bitterness was still present. From the interviews it appears that there may be issues that churches still have to address.

In the internet monitoring of the word "spirituality" articles there appears to be an acknowledgement that this separation of religion from spirituality is being detected in other research and is certainly being discussed in current articles<sup>15</sup>.

It was privilege to be able to sit and listen to these wonderful and interesting older people as they shared their history, stories, spirituality and their belief systems. All interviewees appeared to be honest, frank, interested in the topic and most really appeared to enjoy having an opportunity to talk about a topic that in many parts of our society is treated as taboo.

The following quote from an interviewee shows how she saw her spirituality and sums up the breadth of interpretation found throughout the interviews.

*"My spirituality is related to how I behave with people – my treatment of them. It is about music – where it takes you, dance, even during the festival, the circus the beauty the live bodies of young people, ballet, music – a lot to do with creativity – drama particularly. All wrapped up in the arts in all forms. The creative arts, The Olympics as well – beauty of course. The manifestation of spirituality. My garden as well"*<sup>16</sup>

### 3.2 Literature search

The first part of the literature search examined mainly recent articles and research findings on spiritual well-being published, both in books and on the internet. This literature search was intended to give a context of what was currently taking place in other parts of the world and to provide trends and suggest questions that could be used to enable the research team to compare their thinking with a wider internet community.

During word searches on the World Wide Web we did find several quantitative research results that had questions that would produce a "yes" and "no" answers or multi choice questionnaires. Several of the questionnaires had been conducted on the internet and most were of university students.

Some of the questions from previous studies were used in the design of this study's questionnaire. As interviewees were elderly and the interviews were to take part in their homes or community settings, we needed to design a format that would prompt our interviewees to talk and discuss their lives generally and their spiritual experiences.

The internet search also identified several research projects that had been conducted by church-based groups. While these studies were helpful when designing the questions, the studies tended to show a bias and lack of separation between the words religion and spirituality. The words spiritual and religion were used to mean the same thing and, as our interviews showed, this was not the understanding of 80% of our interviewees.

Finding a usable definition for the word "spiritual" or "spirituality" on the internet and in dictionaries was a challenge – there were so many different interpretations that accepting any one would have been unhelpful. We were looking for the

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<sup>15</sup> Zuckerman, P (2009)

<sup>16</sup> Female interviewee from Wellington

meaning and hence didn't want to make an assumption as to what it meant before we started. The decision was later reflected in the range of meanings given to the word by the interviewees.

The literature/internet research also identified a number of qualitative, on-line interviews, including one by the Victoria University of Wellington that asked a series of "yes", "no" or "don't know" questions. The literature/ internet research also examined New Zealand's curriculum papers and conference papers given as part of all levels of New Zealand's education system. These papers and documents were examined to find reference to ideas associated with spiritual well-being and then to link this information with what had been called "values." We had hoped to find examples of where the words "spirituality" or "ideology" are mentioned in curriculum information generally.

Our findings showed that the New Zealand Ministry of Education Curriculum did promote the need for students to learn about values. While there were a couple of papers presented to conferences which suggested a need for spirituality to be part of learning, there appeared to be little acknowledgement of ideology or no recognition of spiritual well-being within our reading of the teaching curriculum.

What was present in the Curriculum was an acknowledgement that in Maori cultural teaching there is a need to include an acknowledgement of the creation story, the place of tupuna (ancestor/s) and Maori protocol, these often included some spiritual concepts and the need for spiritual well-being.

The research team noted as relevant to the research the following values as outlined in the Curriculum and thought these values may be reflected in the interviews on spirituality.

These values were expressed as follows:

*Students will be encouraged to value:*

- a) **excellence**, by aiming high and by persevering in the face of difficulties
- b) **innovation, inquiry, and curiosity**, by thinking critically, creatively, and reflectively
- c) **diversity**, as found in our different cultures, languages, and heritages
- d) **equity**, through fairness and social justice
- e) **community and participation** for the common good
- f) **ecological sustainability**, which includes care for the environment
- g) **integrity**, which involves being honest, responsible, and accountable and acting ethically
- h) and to **respect** themselves, others, and human rights.

*Through their learning experiences, students will learn about:*

- a) their own values and those of others
- b) different kinds of values, such as moral, social, cultural, aesthetic, and economic values
- c) the values on which New Zealand's cultural and institutional traditions are based
- d) the values of other groups and cultures.

*Through their learning experiences, students will develop their ability to:*

- a) express their own values
- b) explore, with empathy, the values of others
- c) critically analyze values and actions based on them

- d) *discuss disagreements that arise from differences in values and negotiate solutions*
- e) *make ethical decisions and act on them*<sup>17</sup>

All of the values listed above can be expanded into clusters of related values that collectively suggest their fuller meanings. For example, community and participation for the common good is associated with values and notions such as peace, citizenship, and manaakitanga.<sup>18</sup>

In the interviews there were a number of interviewees who believed “respect” to be one of the important “spiritual codes of behaviour”.<sup>19</sup>

This values were also reflected in material produced by the Hillary Commission (now SPARC), the organisation charged with promoting sport in New Zealand. In the following statement there is an acknowledgement of “mauri”, the life force. This concept of mauri was also echoed by the interviews with all but one of the Maori participants in the research. This concept can be seen as reinforcing a value and the idea of ‘life force’ was expressed by the Maori interviewees and from one of the interviewees from the Buddhist faith.

*“He Oranga Poutama has been operating throughout rural and urban settings for almost a decade, utilising organised sports and physical activity opportunities to embrace the mauri [life force] of Māori communities. The ‘Te Whare Tapa Whā’ model has been instrumental in the establishment of the programme which bases its foundations on the four elements necessary for well-being: te taha tinana (physical), te taha wairua [spiritual], te taha hinengaro [mental] and te taha whānau [family]”.*<sup>20</sup>

This Hillary Commission reference is relevant to the findings of this report and provides a New Zealand context.

The literature/internet search also examined articles that separated religion from spirituality and looked at behaviours in countries which see themselves as secular. Increasingly there are articles and research showing that the most religious countries are not necessarily the most “moral” or “peaceful”.

The following quote by Phil Zuckerman, Associate Professor of Sociology at Pitzer College, in his 2008 book, *Society Without God*, reinforces other research which shows that a belief in God is not a necessary prerequisite for acceptable behaviour and well-being in society:

*“What are societies like when faith in God is minimal, church attendance is drastically low, and religion is a distinctly muted and marginal aspect of everyday life?”*

*“Many people assume that religion is what keeps people moral, that a society without God would be hell on earth: rampant with immorality, full of evil, and teeming with depravity. But that doesn't seem to be the case for*

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Education (2007) New Zealand curriculum - Wellington

<sup>18</sup> [nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/the\\_new\\_zealand\\_curriculum/values](http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/the_new_zealand_curriculum/values)

<sup>19</sup> Taranaki and Waikato interviewees

<sup>20</sup> Hillary Commission (2000)

*Scandinavians in those two countries [Denmark and Sweden]. Although they may have relatively high rates of petty crime and burglary, and although these crime rates have been on the rise in recent decades, their overall rates of violent crime— including murder, aggravated assault, and rape— are among the lowest on earth. Yet the majority of Danes and Swedes do not believe that God is "up there," keeping diligent tabs on their behavior, slating the good for heaven and the wicked for hell. Most Danes and Swedes don't believe that sin permeates the world, and that only Jesus, the Son of God, who died for their sins, can serve as a remedy. In fact, most Danes and Swedes don't even believe in the notion of "sin".<sup>21</sup>*

Much of the older literature and some of the current internet articles still used the words spirituality and religion synonymously, but increasingly recent studies and this study's interviewees (described in the next section) present a different picture. The separation of spiritual well-being from religion is a significant shift in thinking and it is a trend that will need to be observed in any deeper literature search.

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21 Zuckerman, P (2008)

### 3.3 What did the older New Zealanders believe?

#### a. Spirituality – what does the word mean to you?

Almost all of those interviewed were clear about their understanding of what these words meant to them.

The answer to this question is best expressed in the words of those interviewed. Many of the statements were half sentences, but the comments give the researches a picture of what those interviewees believed the word meant to them.

These are some of those quotes:

*"Other dimensions of human life – refinement and summary of the way we are human beings – complex – the conception of beauty and the universe. Also about human potential and creativity."*

*"Spirituality is to do with love."*

*"Being in a place that is special/also something that is beautiful/emotional."  
(2)*

*"...a dimension in life that doesn't have anything to do with material things. Good and bad – like day and night – you can't have one without the other. Spiritual side of life [is] by far the most important bit .Each of us needs to realise that we are all spiritual beings."*

*"Spirituality – [...it is] about the core of my being. An essential part of being human, ...yes an essential part of being human."*

*"...part of God, but also associated with my heritage." (2 interviewees)*

*"Quest for something beyond the comprehension. Relationship with God. Sense of other. Sense of wonder and beauty."*

*"Something beyond oneself, beyond the physical, some sort of life time feeling."*

*"It is a person's individual attempt to understand the world and to understand themselves and try to see nature and what does it [nature] mean."*

*"How you feel inside, not only with God, but how you feel about things around you in yourself and your life. Whether you are OK with things in the world."*

*"In contact with God." "My relationship with God."*

*"Something to do with God, but not a fixed identity."*

*"The essence of our being. All being. The spirit of streams, rivers, mountain."*

*"The soul, the spiritual world rather than the material world, includes spiritual feeling in a crowd (Rugby) listening to music, experience with people."*

*"Concept of beauty" "its about beauty" "it speaks to me of beauty". "Maybe it is about beauty or about/something beautiful." (4 different interviewees)*

*"It is being in the bush when tramping."*

*"The spark within us." "the spark – you know that spark – that is spirituality" (2 interviewees)*

*"Who we are?"*

*"Something beyond us". "Something there we don't know about". "Positive – yes". "Yes, negative as well, when things don't go my way". "It is the Environment and definitely Music." "Spirituality when we get lost in Music, Beethoven. Just sail away to somewhere." (6 interviewees)*

*"Inner strength, creativity, inner strength that comes from my belief system." (2 interviewees)*

*"My spirituality [is] related to and is about music – where it takes you, dance, even during the festival, the circus, a lot to do with creativity – drama particularly. All wrapped up in the arts in all forms. The creative arts. The Olympics as well – beauty. The manifestation of spirituality. My garden as well".*

*"Spirituality is those basics of core inner beliefs, that is through nurture and nature."*

*.[Spirituality] "... means a deep awareness of who we are and who I am in relation to the Creator."*

*"Being in a place that is special/also something that is beautiful emotional."*

*"About the sea/about the beach/the sunset."*

*"Standing on a hill (on the beach) – that is when spirituality occurs." (4 interviewees used almost the same words – for two it was the hill and two it was the beach)*

*"Spirituality is within me and my soul."*

*"Something deep within me." "something deep inside [pause] inside me"[pointing to his heart] "spirituality its deep inside us all" (3 different interviewees)*

The research team started the research with an assumption that the words "spirituality" or "spiritual" meant something like *the core of being*, therefore we were surprised to find that the majority of our interviewees had a significantly different understanding of the words. The team was also surprised at how widely the word is interpreted, not only by different cultural and religious groups, but by people within the different cultural and religious groups. This diversity was also reflected in the definitions found during our internet search.

With the exception of the 15% of interviewees who were active daily participants in their religions, the interviewees appeared to see the word as a process, and therefore as part of their quest for some ultimate meaning in life. This meaning was expressed, they suggested, through beauty, nature, music and being something beyond ourselves. Those who were actively engaged in their religions saw the words as being associated with God or a higher being.

Searching for spirituality (a process) was seen by 10% of the interviewees as a quest that involves their personal development, and they saw it as linking themselves to something higher than themselves – not necessarily a God or higher being, but something more than what we currently understand in life. This definition for them included beauty and harmony, ideas of perfection, the need to think and act creatively and associated with imagination, or a need to communicate and interact with other human beings.

There was also a desire to find some kind of *"inner strength" – "something beyond the search for material things in what was seen as an increasingly material world<sup>22</sup>"*.

For many interviewees, there was a need to become entwined in their own cultures and to express their spirituality, as they saw it, through and in their own languages. It was this concept that provided the team with the different meanings for words and the way they were used. This was particularly true of the Maori interviewees, but also of the Hindu and Buddhist interviewees. Only one person dismissed the words "spiritual" and "spirituality" and said that they were just emotional words overused and not relevant to today.

For some, the words were hard to define. There were often long silences in the interviews as the interviewee grappled with words to express their thoughts about the meanings of these terms. Many said that defining these terms was hard, complex or emotional. The interviewer did not try to shorten these silences as they demonstrated just how seriously the interviewees were taking the interviews and how hard they were thinking about their answers.

If the silence became really uncomfortable, the interviewee was prompted and asked if "spiritual" was a positive word. There was almost always a sudden certainty and response, for example *"Oh yes"* or *"Yes – definitely positive"*.

A second prompt asked about whether "spiritual" was associated with beauty, music, the arts, environment, and again the interviewees became animated as if the interviewer had given them the words that they couldn't grasp.<sup>23</sup>

*"Yes yes, beauty", "Oh yes definitely music", "the sea and the waves – beauty", "Not the arts, but yes music and nature."* (3 different interviewees in answer to prompt)

The internet research had suggested that belief systems and spirituality provided people with an external platform through which their cultures function. The interviews did not support this assumption. Those interviewed had such a diverse and different perception of what spirituality meant for them, that when the questions asked for information about identity, the answers seldom linked to concepts of spiritual well-being, even though this had been a focus of the interview.

It was, therefore, not possible to conclude that spirituality confirms who a person is (i.e. their identity). What was evident was that those who had a structured belief system that they had developed throughout their lives appeared to have ways that could give them strength and a way to interpret spiritual matters and enhance their spiritual well-being. This structure influenced their behaviours and gave them support, encouraged caring, and helped them to produce meaningful relationships with others – but this was only the case with few of those interviewed.

The findings showed that while those interviewed did understand, and in many cases have what they would call spiritual well-being, this spiritual well-being was only associated with religion or a place of worship by a few interviewees.

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<sup>22</sup> Two interviewees, Wellington and Waikato expressed spirituality in these/ and similar words

<sup>23</sup> **Note:** Before the prompts many of the interviewees had given similar responses, so the researcher didn't feel that prompting produced anything more than focussing the thoughts the interviewee was trying to express. The assertive nature of these prompt answers demonstrating the way these Older New Zealanders were grappling with their search for a meaning for spirituality.

*"Spirituality is not necessarily religion... It is about understanding the universe, about the world we live in and the people we live with. It is about how my life got here."<sup>24</sup>*

These interviewees who made the association more often belonged to and attended a church, synagogue, mosque, temple or religion-based organisation.

For the 15% who were active daily involved in their religion was seen as a structured, developed and organised expression of their spirituality.

A surprise was that 10% of the interviewees who were regular attendees at Christian churches didn't only link spirituality with their religion and, later in the interview when asked about religion, it emerged that they attended church both to express their spirituality, but also because it provided them with community or friendships, as well as purely spiritual well-being.

There were four exceptions, and they were from interviewees for who belonged to Islam, Hindu and a fundamentalist Christian religion. For them, the religious part of their identity, their spirituality and their cultures was part of their sense of belonging.

It was also surprising to note that many of those interviewed who did not belong to any formal religion saw themselves as "spiritual people". *"I am a very spiritual person,"* said one person who didn't attend any formal religion. Others expressed a belief that they were spiritual and that they expressed that spirituality in music, dance, the environment, and particularly in their love for and awe of the beach, bush, mountains and rivers.

*"I am really in touch with my spiritual side – I relate to that side, particularly when I am walking on the beach"<sup>25</sup>.*

The descriptions of spirituality broadly fitted into distinctly different groups of interviewees.

The group saw the word as being associated with their personal journey to find a meaning for their lives. The meaning was usually associated with self, inner self or a mix of history, identity and their life experiences.

The group of interviewees saw the words as being associated with their relationship with their religion in terms of their relationship with higher beings, God, angels, guardians and the supernatural. These interviewees described personal "spiritual experiences" and were "searching for answers to help them to understand these experiences"<sup>26</sup>.

The third group saw spirituality as associated with the environment, music, beauty, experiences outside of themselves, sunsets, rivers, waves, sea, lakes and mountains; their awe felt towards the natural and human world generally, sometimes also in great historic buildings; sometimes cathedrals.

The fourth much smaller category saw spirituality as being associated with community, with family and with one's relationship with other people generally. How they related to other people and how these relationships influenced their journey through life was significant. They tended to be the most certain and

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<sup>24</sup> Interviewee Wellington

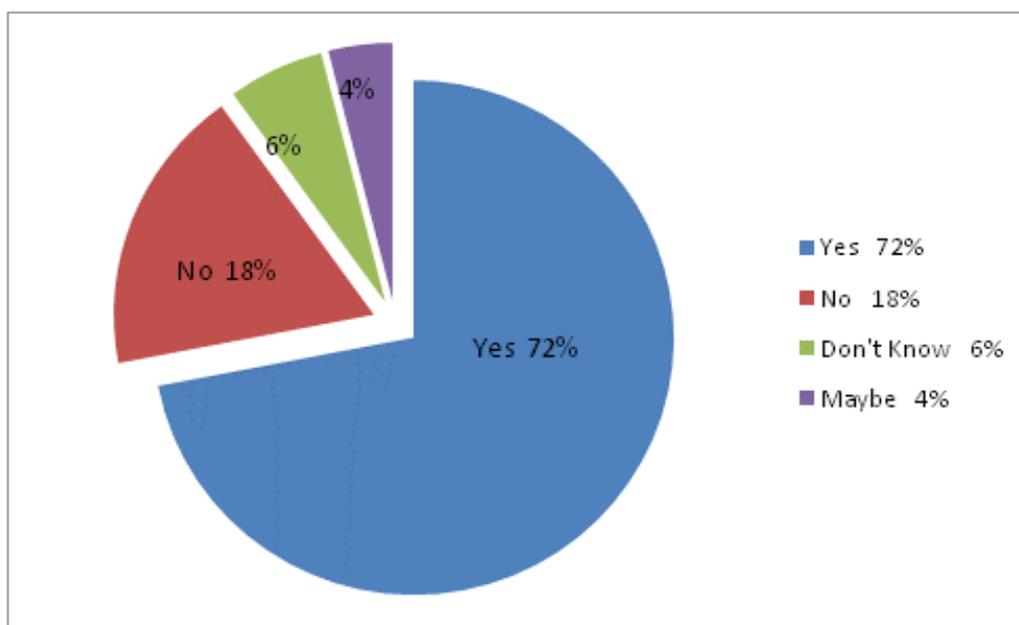
<sup>25</sup> Interviewee from Kapiti Coast

<sup>26</sup> Interviewee from Taranaki

decisive of the interviewees and often appeared not to associate the word "spirituality" as being related to either God or the environment.

Spread over these four categories was a thread of thinking which was a personal journey toward finding a meaning for things that were not explained; a belief in a Higher Being, an awe of the natural and human worlds and a need to relate somehow to a community. For some it also involved creativity and imagination often associated with music, the arts and writing, particularly poetry.

### Do you believe in a God or Higher Being?



#### b. Do you believe in a God or Higher Being?

The following are quotes from answers to this question from those interviewees who believed in God or a Higher Being:

*"Yes everything that is beautiful comes from God."*

*"Yes I believe and he is very important to me."*

*"Yes, I am amazed by beauty of nature – that is God."*

*"One creator, redeeming sustaining person."*

*"Yes, a powerful force, I believe that there is also a Holy Spirit that provides order in the world."*

*"God the Eternal, Absolute, He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him" Quran ((Koran) 112:1-4) [from notes posted after the interview]*

*"I certainly do - I have devoted my whole life to Him. [My] earliest memory was about talking to God."*

*"God the father, maker of heaven and earth etc. But [I] don't deny that other faiths have God experiences. Buddhists and Muslims are in heaven as well. When we die we are confronted with a presence of Christ."*

*"Must be, I sort of think there is. Not like the God watching you. There is something much greater than us. Sure [pause] He is order. If haphazard but there is [pause] the universe.[pause] Yes a greater intelligence."*

*"Yes – the world in all its magnificence must have been created. It wasn't just allowed to evolve."*

*"The word God in Arabic is Allah, which is comprised of two words, Al-Alah. The word "Al" means "the" and the word "Ilah" means "worth worship". Allah means the only one worth worship."*

*"Oh for me as a kid, it was more to do with guilt, me doing naughty things. As I grew older the concept of God [became] irrelevant."*

*"God is creation. You can't use his name [he is] bigger than that."*

*"Spiritual this is my view – God is one, people believe in a different One God. Hindu my God, no there is one God."*

*"One God... She is my God."*

*"Yes, God in Islam very unique, no one else. We do not imagine God or any image".*

*"No not in the sense out there. He is a thought"*

*"Yes, we had names for our Gods before colonisation, but then the missionaries gave us the Bible and Tangaroa had a different name. Still the one God."*

*"Lord Rama and Shita are inside my heart. [pause] God is inside me. He is the most powerful and he is with me."*

*"Christian God created the world. But I also believe in Papatuanuku - the Earth Mother and Ranginui - the Sky Father<sup>27</sup>*

*"God is one. All the earth and everything in it belongs to Him."*

In this research, we found that 72% of those interviewed believed there was a God or Higher Being, with the remaining 18% believing that there was no God. Interviewees from Islamic and Jewish backgrounds didn't want to use a name for this higher being, but did believe in a higher being. This being was considered too awesome to describe.

This figure is lower than similar research in the USA, where the latest independent data we found on the internet suggests:

*This survey found that 79% of Americans believe there is a God, and that 66% are absolutely certain this is true. Only 9% do not believe in God, while a further 12% are not sure.<sup>28</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> Note; the second part of the quote is translated from the Maori – the interviewee used Maori a lot in this interview and it was translated by the interviewer.

Several of the interviewees in our study who did not believe in God did talk about the wonders of science and evolution. One asked what happened before the big bang, and 4% noted that they just couldn't believe that a loving God could allow for so much cruelty in the world.

As well as a belief in one God, there were many who also believed in more than one God and in demi Gods – these gods were not seen as angels or guardians; they were more important. Some mentioned various Hindu Gods and the Gods of Maori mythology, who were linked to the interviewees' codes of behaviour and the creation stories. These other gods were associated with creation, with tasks that could include looking after the sea, land, wind, mountains and more often the trees, plants and forests.

Several of the interviewees believed in these other gods in addition to their one God and sometimes there were parallel creation stories which the interviewee believed in as well as the Christian God and creation stories. The abstract nature of spiritual well-being appearing to add to the way interviewees appeared to contradict themselves, especially when talking about the one God and gods, also when they discussed superstitions.

During the Pacific Islanders focus group one of the interviewees discussed their God Tangaroa. He said that until the missionaries arrived *"We only knew God as Tangaroa, but after the Missionaries came they gave us his real name 'God,' but He is the same God<sup>29</sup>"*.

Quotes from interviewees who did not believe in God or didn't know what they believe:

*"NO – the reason why: If we had a loving God with a loving world, he made a mess of it. How could you be a loving God and create a world of earthquakes, floods, war. If this was in the hands of a creator, he has a long way to go."*

*"[I] Don't know. I believe in ultimate good. Synchronicity [pause] threads drawn together."*

*"No idea if a creator. People put faces to energies, but for me it doesn't matter."*

*"Don't know [pause] I am working on it."*

*"Not really. Why would a God look after us? [pause] Cruelty and tragic happenings. [pause] Not peoples fault. People killed in war, [there are] earthquake. That attitude [is] not for me. Not a beard person in the sky. God doesn't come into it. If there is a God why does this happen, can't accept that there is a God."*

*"As a child I had this idea of god in the sky. I remember asking my mother, who had just flown to Australia, if she had seen God. That was my concept of God .[pause] God could be the goodness in people. [pause] No, not a God up there."*

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<sup>28</sup> [www.harrisinteractive.com/news](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news) These are some of the results of a survey by Harris Interactive® based on a nationwide sample of 2,306 adults surveyed online between September 16 and 23, 2003. (USA)

<sup>29</sup> Comment during Waikato Pacific Island focus group

### c. Creator, creation and evolution

#### **Was the earth created by a Higher Being?**

"God created Heaven and Earth. 6 day – of course time limit doesn't matter."

"Yes, our globe came out of something out of space. Something that guides it."

"Creation a manifestation of God. We are thrown into reincarnation. Yes very much so. Our sun body and energy. Evolution whole of life."

"All universe is made from a thought, God a man made word, I don't need physical being to tell me who God is. God not out there, God is in here [self]."

"God the creator. Don't like to use the word God, lots of baggage associated with that word. . [He is the] Ultimate being. [His] Power being present in everything–[pause] Power or life force. [pause]' In all things. [pause] Every living being. [pause]' Dalai Llama says being. This table, this rock, all have a divine life force. [pause] Science quantum physics now appear to be the same as the mystics are saying. God the father, son, holy spirit concepts you can work into this philosophy. [pause] Initial presence at the beginning of Creation. Prior to Creation there was God. God became the creator."

"Don't think it matters. [I have]- no idea and not prepared to waste time and energy worrying about it. [people have] Generated hatred from these issues. I went to Palestine and I saw the terrible situation by people in search for their fulfilment."

"Christian God created the world. But we also believe in Ranginui and Papatuanuku."

"Doubt it very much."

"Yes [I believe] and evolution OK."

"Created by something - something had to create it. Evolution also makes sense."

"Hedging towards it. Not quite in as the Bible. I don't take the Bible literally."

"Somehow we started from something. Yes order"

"Yes [pause] in seven stages not 7 days [pause] – evolution important. [The] stages are the same. Theology the why and science the how."

"Not a God – we just don't know – something or someone must have set it all off. A life force. [in] Jewish thinking you cannot give it a name."

"The Creator, I sense God through creation. [pause] Yes the Creator. [pause] Metaphor as a child is born connected by the umbilical cord, but we are still connected to God and when we die it is just like the bungy cord and we bounce back to God. [pause] Sin somehow we cut the cord."

"The world is amazing. Just look at the cells we are made of – all different. Then the power of the weather –the storm. [pause] I don't know why there are earthquakes and storms – they are so indiscriminate. I don't know what I believe because if God is good then why do bad things happen? I don't know about him as creator".

*"Creation – no clear answer. Have a feeling that things balance out. Lots of supernatural things happen I think about. [pause] I kept bees – there is an order that is spiritual. [pause] There can be a reason but yet it is spiritual. Amazing – worked out by a law – which is spiritual."*

*"For much of the society this [creation] works, but as far as God being blamed for everything. No I am afraid I don't believe."*

*"Sometimes we believe that God should do what the fairy god-mother does and when he doesn't then we are cross with God."*

*"The world is too full of destruction for it to have a creator." "Yes a creator, [pause] don't know what to call it."*

The question relating to God as Creator, and evolution and creation prompted animated responses.

This question was easier for interviewees to answer than the question about God or a Higher Being. Most of the interviewees had a view about creation. While only 4% some believed the Biblical story of the creation in seven days, another 10% of the interviewee did believe the world was made in six stages. These interviewees saw no contradiction between evolutionary theory and the Bible version of the creation. While the literature/ internet search showed spirited debate about the theory of intelligent design,<sup>30</sup> only one of those interviewed referred to this debate, and that was to disagree with the theories.

68% of interviewees share a belief in some kind of intervention in the creation process.

*"What happened before the big bang?", "The earth is too beautiful to have been designed by accident.", "God made the world in six stages"<sup>31</sup>.*

They believed that God or gods (whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Maori) created the earth and the heavens, and all within. He (or in one case She) did that in stages, some noting that these stages were recorded in the various creation stories – including the Bible and Koran.

Another 26% of interviewees believed in a creation based on evolution and science. They pointed out that during this evolutionary process, mistakes happen, and argued that if there is a creator god, he would/could/should intervene more often and should have made fewer mistakes.

Earthquakes and floods and the devastation of natural disasters were discussed by many of the interviewees as evidence that there is not a God or that the God was not involved in the day to day running of the process, certainly not as a loving God. Some who didn't believe in God argued that this was because they thought

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30 Intelligent design is the assertion that "certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection." It is a modern form of the traditional teleological argument for the existence of God that avoids specifying the nature or identity of the designer. The idea was developed by a group of American creationists who reformulated their argument in the creation-evolution controversy to circumvent court rulings that prohibit the teaching of creationism as science. Intelligent design's leading proponents, all of whom are associated with the Discovery Institute, a politically conservative think tank, believe the designer to be the God of Christianity. Advocates of intelligent design argue that it is a scientific theory, and seek to fundamentally redefine science to accept supernatural explanations. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia) (note: While Wikipedia is sometimes not considered reliable as a reference tool, for this research this was the clearest description of Intelligent design we could find)

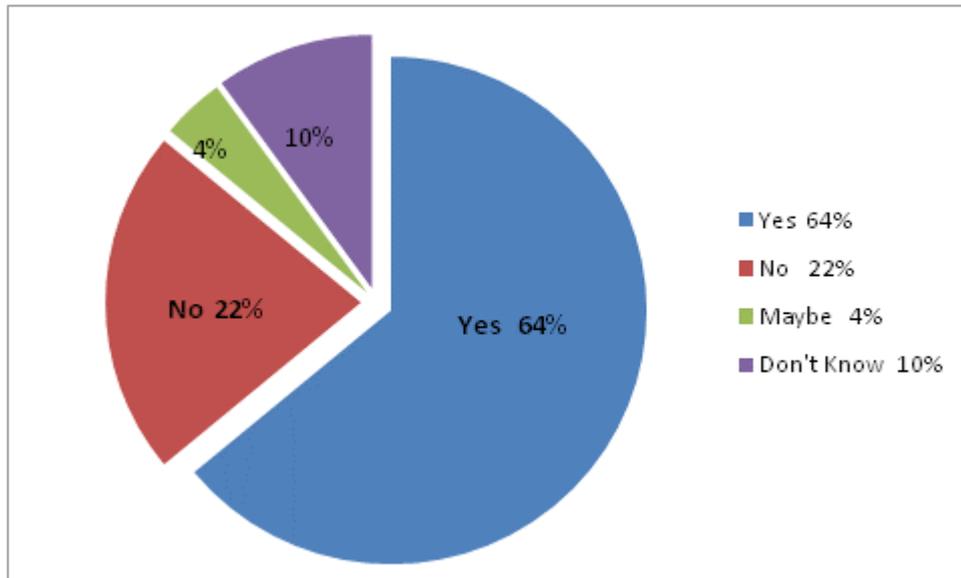
<sup>31</sup> Interviewees from Wellington and Kapiti Coast

that a loving god would not allow disasters, war, floods, unexplained death and cruelty.

*"Why doesn't he stop wars and why do human beings get disease<sup>32</sup>?"*

Only 6% didn't know what they believed for this question.

### Do you believe in Angels/ guardians/ tupuna or ghosts



#### d. Angels/guardians/tupuna/ghosts

Quotes from interviewees in relation angels, guardians, tupuna or ghosts.

*"Yes [pause] angels or [pause] and lesser gods"*

*"I am connected with my ancestors, often through a third person. Yes."*

*"Not so sure about prophets, yes maybe Angels. One visited me in Hospital."*

*"[I] Don't get tied up on Angels – No don't believe we have a guardian angel. I do believe in an ever-present God."*

*"Yes I have a guardian. I was told that I had a guardian – and I have seen him once in a time of extreme stress. [pause] Music opens up this and a facet in our lives ,makes me open to hear my guardian."*

*"Yes. The Guardian does intervene. [at this point this interviewee told a long story which involved him being in a terrible accident] -'before I went out [that day] the dogs [guardians] said " Don't go – they did warned me of death and that was important and saved my life – I was aware something might happen – being aware saved my life [pause] yes that saved my life – the dogs saved my life."*

*"Kaitiaki – ka hua ngā tāngata – Ghosts – Tupuna. [pause] This land [Waikato] special with spirits. About Maori Gods, Atua Maori. [pause] Yes*

<sup>32</sup> Interviewee from Taranaki

*they have been influential in my life. My former School – they [the tupuna] influenced the building of the Whare Nui [meeting house]. We needed to ask for guidance on where is this project was heading. [pause] Whether we should have stopped.*

*The project took a long time to complete. The carvings and tukutuku amazing. [pause] Unique.”*

*“[there is a] Inner peace – connected with my mum, aunts [pause] they have gone on.[I] have this connection with them. Tupuna guardians, I have a guardian and she is a her [a woman] , maybe not an angel she is one of my tupuna. [pause] My sister [pause] – she has been with me since she died 2000. [pause] She is telling me off now. She is here.”*

*“Yes, and Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit and angels and the innocence of children.”*

*“Yes, there are seven articles of faith. We believe in God, the angels, the prophets, the good and bad [that] comes from God; [pause] the last day and life after death.”*

*“I see things happening in life [pause] – in one’s own life – and you wonder. [pause] Experiences that I can’t explain. Some spiritual life somewhere. [pause] Do exist in another form. Through thought waves. See these unexplained phenomena. Maybe existence after death. The energy that makes you goes to another side. We don’t have the brain to understand. [Pause] We can’t think what you [we] can become.”*

*“No, that is not a question I can answer – it is not helpful.”*

*“No I don’t think they [angels, guardians] apply to me. In a sense it would be like someone looking after me. [pause] A lot of things that happen in life you create for yourself. It is up to you to do things.”*

*“Yes, [pause] a spiritual dimension to life and it finds expression in good and evil. God through his angels does intervene – yet evil can disrupt anything in that realm it [pause] that isn’t from God.”*

These quotations came directly from the tapes – while some sound disjointed this was the nature of the answers. Some of the above quotations are from individuals who had not contributed more than a few words in the first part of the interview. Their angels were really important to them, even if expressing themselves was not easy. For the Maori interviewees this was a particularly important question and several of the above interviews reflect their views on angels.

The majority of interviewees did believe that there was “something”. From our sample, 66% did believe in the existence of spirits, angels, guardians, tupuna, ghosts and it appeared they also used their angels to explain the unexplainable and along with guardians they provided support in times of trouble.

This question evoked longer and fuller answers than any previous question. Our interviewees had lots of opinions about whether there were angels, ghosts, guardians, ancestors, and whether relatives who had gone on to another world, or to a parallel world communicated with them and how.

The interviewees fell into two distinctly different groups in their beliefs about ancestors, angels or guardians 64%. Either they believed or they didn’t. Only 10% didn’t know and only 4% said maybe. The interviewees who said they didn’t believe were often emphatic, just giving one word ‘no’ – yet two of these participants who had said ‘no’ emphatically questioned why the community were

so interested or enthusiastic about TV programmes like "Sensing Murder" and "Medium."<sup>33</sup>

There were extreme views expressed. One interviewee from Wellington believed in hierarchies of angels, and explained that one needs to pray to the correct ones. That interviewee explained that the junior angels arrange things like parking spaces, he went on to discuss how the more important angels were in charge of life, death and stressful situations.

*"Yes I believe in Jesus and in angels. I work with the angels – I do need to pray to something beyond me. [pause] That is my angel and it has results. Jesus is a super-being. Christians pray for car parks. But that is not his [Jesus] job, it can't be done by Jesus – the task is too big a job [for one angel] They [angels] have to have the three different levels of angel. [pause] Trees have spirits, we have spirits, we all have angels that guide us."<sup>34</sup>*

Sometimes the angels were seen as intermediaries to God. Some interviewees believed that they petition God for you if you need something.

On the other hand, there were three participants who believed that one should communicate with angels and spirits only with expressed caution, for example:

*"You might get what you ask for and that may be the wrong thing for you"<sup>35</sup>.*

One interviewee believed in the power of what he called "white light". He believed that one could call on that light to bring about positive change. He considered that covering someone he didn't like with white light or someone who is being negative could bring positive and lasting peace, both for that person and for himself<sup>36</sup>.

Others Wellington interviewee believed that the spirits dwelt in the world around us. He described fairies, goblins and the spirits of trees. He stressed that these beings were usually positive. A different interview, also from Wellington talked about negative spirits as well and that he could always tell the difference. One interviewee described an experience with a spirit of a Pohutukawa tree and his role in transferring the tree spirit from one tree to another.

What was surprising to the researchers was that few mentioned the Holy Spirit during this discussion of angels or spirits. This could have been because the Holy Spirit was seen as part of the Christian Trinity and, therefore, would have been better discussed under a heading of belief in God or a Higher Being.

When it came to ghosts, most of the 64% who believed in angels and guardians also believed that ghosts existed and 10% of interviewees described experiences which involved a ghost or in one case several ghosts. These ghosts were almost always associated with a specific place or an event. Interviewees tended to describe them as people who had unresolved issues associated with their deaths, and needed to be released from those issues. One interviewee noted:

<sup>33</sup> Both TV programmes were running during the time of the interviews and featured psychics who could communicate with the dead.

<sup>34</sup> Interviewee from Wellington

<sup>35</sup> Interviewee from Taranaki

<sup>36</sup> Interviewee from Wellington

*"I have a mechanism and ability that enables me to help ghosts to be released, sometimes these are dead relatives, but sometimes the ghost is unhappy in this world and needed to find the passage to the next<sup>37</sup>."*

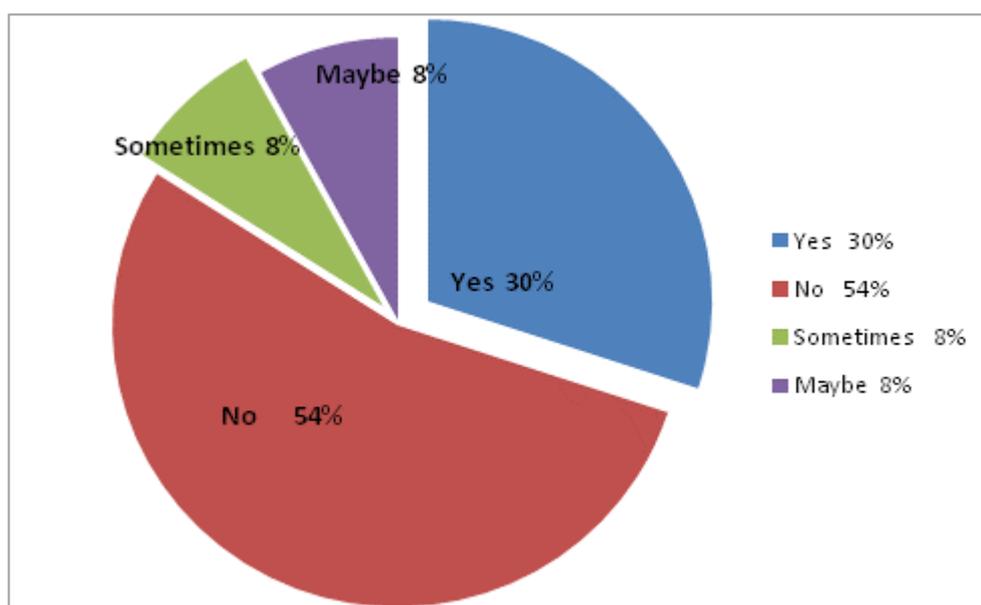
One other interviewee spoke of a similar power that he had used that he associated with his church. He described a type of cleansing for a spirit or ghost and setting it free – this experience taking place in Hawkes Bay was described with clarity and detail.

Occasionally the ghosts described were wandering spirits and these were described as being both good and bad – in one case both.

Interviewees also described supernatural beings (angels and guardians) as being supportive, giving advice, and answering prayers. As one interviewee put it *"my guardian is just around."*

The degree to which participants believed that the guardians intervened in their lives varied greatly. While 64% had believed in these being, far fewer could give actual examples of them appearing to them. It was also interesting to note that 5% of those who believed in an Angel or Guardian didn't believe in one God. Only 22% of participants thought that there were no external beings and 10% didn't know.

### Are you superstitious?



#### e. Superstitions

Quotes from interviewees in relation to their belief in superstition

*"[I] Don't step on the cracks [pause] [I am] careful not to walk under ladders [pause] not really [ pause] well maybe. Numbers add to 7 are luck - life is chance – there was chance when my parents met."*

*"No not at all, my grand parents highly superstitions. [They] Wouldn't do this and that. [I wouldn't have] Wattle in house.[pause] Peacock Tea cups [pause]. I think it is just fun."*

<sup>37</sup> Interviewee from Wellington

"Yes –[I throw] salt over left shoulder. Fortune tellers don't tell me anything. Some way some [fortune tellers] tell the most amazing things. A spiritual thing [pause] some have something. Wouldn't walk under ladders. 7 and 4, 4 & 3 = 7. Lucky [pause] yes I am lucky."

"I am cautious; don't like looking at the new moon through glass. Turn over money if do see new moon. Not under a ladder. Black cat lucky in Scotland/unlucky in US."

"We are all superstitious. As we get older we regard it as rubbish. We do little things that are so silly. Buddhist very superstitious. If the gecko makes the clicking noise - I am not like that. I hang that thing at the door - it is not even nice –but it brings good fortune. It does some good."

"Don't think so. I walk in one door and out the other. I walk under ladders."

"All horoscopes are made in India for us. All our children and grandchildren have horoscopes. We have them made based on the time of the day they are born and the date."

"I have gypsy in by bones so yes I am superstitious. I have lucky numbers - well they are meant to be lucky - I have never won lotto."

"the birds warned me - they often tell me what to do."

"Superstition yes I think I am - well at least my children think I am. I am lucky. I can't do anything with 13, I will not do anything on the 13<sup>th</sup>."

"I play poker - if you have the mathematical ability you calculate the odds, so it isn't luck it calculations. You know what are your chances [pause] not complete random chance. Like the butterfly fluttering its wings in Cuba, affecting us here."

"More applicable to earlier people. [pause] Lot of nonsense."

"No. but yes 39 is my lucky number. My partner he gets 37. 39 my school number. Secrets within the psalms - numbers are hidden. 7 is one of those, but no not superstitious."

We found that 31 % of those interviewed saw themselves as superstitious, with another 15% saying "maybe" they were superstitious. 51% said they were not superstitious, although some of these did have lucky numbers. Only 4% said they didn't know. Several said they always read their horoscope, regardless of whether they were superstitious or not.

This superstition question was often treated as a joke by the interviewees, something that was a bit of fun, with only 10% of the interviewees taking it seriously. For those who did take it seriously, their superstitions were part of their spirituality and their relationship with their guardians. Some of the superstitions they followed were influences from something supernatural. In one case the birds they were afraid of warned them when they had to be careful. Other participants "didn't quite believe in it" [superstitions], yet at the same time acknowledged that their adherence to them provided a different dimension in their lives. The very superstitious in these interviews certainly allowed their superstitions to influence and rule their lives.

The following were the most commonly mentioned superstitions.

- a) Not walking under ladders
- b) Throwing salt over one's shoulder if spilt
- c) Not seeing the new moon through glass
- d) Fear of breaking mirrors
- e) Messages associated with birds (particularly if a bird comes inside)
- f) Various views on black cats – sometimes bad luck, sometimes good luck
- g) Never cutting finger or toe nails after dark
- h) Pick up pins to give luck.

Interviewees were then asked if they believed in luck and here at least half would continue to joke about superstition and luck – saying *"I am lucky" – "I am not lucky"*<sup>38</sup> rather than describing what they believed that this word meant. Interviewees were then asked about lucky numbers or colours, and again there was enthusiasm from many of those interviewed. Those lucky numbers included 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 21, 22, 23, 24, 37 and 39. Numbers most often mentioned were 7, 5 and 22.

Lucky colours given were blue, brown, and red.

10% of those interviewed had either a belief or a respect for numbers, and these interviewees also linked this interest to horoscopes and numerology. These responses were more often associated with Hindu interviewees, but two of the male interviewees expressed a fascination for numbers. Numbers they associated with design and patterns and while this wasn't necessarily about superstition, these interviewees discussed numbers as part of the question. One man used numbers a lot in his work and was influenced by their different colours and designs – suggesting that they had different *"powers"*<sup>39</sup>. He talked about the numbers in the psalms and how they balanced, but also in architecture and pyramids.

Several interviewees described their superstitious nature as being from their background or ethnicity: *"I have Gypsy blood"*, *"I am Irish and therefore believe in leprechauns and Fairies"*, *"I am Italian..."*, *"My family had roots in Hungary – maybe Gypsy"*<sup>40</sup>

## **f. Codes of Behaviour**

Quotes from the interviewees on codes of behaviour based on belief systems

*"We never played cards on Sundays, was pretty free in the War, No not really."*

*"Yes respect for others."*

*"Yes in my medical practice, good caring doctor."*

*"Brought up in Church so yes, ten commandments."*

*"Ingrained from childhood, but in all that is belief in God - loving and caring."*

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<sup>38</sup> Interviewees from Kapiti Coast and Taranaki

<sup>39</sup> The use here of the word 'powers' by the Wellington interviewee appeared to be linked with making and designing things. Suggesting that the numbers had different properties and influences.

<sup>40</sup> Interviewees from Kapiti Coast, Wellington and Taranaki

*"Well I was brought up in Church of England, then Methodist, then boy scouts, I love church atmosphere, [pause] a time to think, yes meditate. Gave me discipline."*

*"God moments. Yes my whole life. I try to live by the Christian code. Not pedantic about the ten commandments. Governed by the charge of Jesus. I am particularly concerned that I respect other belief systems as well."*

*"Yes at different levels - love God and love neighbours like self."*

*"No comes from my own - influence by grandmother. I make my own decision. They are mine and I have decided which way I should go. They influence my behaviour."*

*"Yes my father staunch Presbyterian. We were made to do. Don't think any good effect. Codes - moral - Sunday school. And Sundays generally. Dress best on Sunday. Walk and go to Museum on Sundays."*

*"I think it does. Hate doing harm to people it upsets me if human beings can do something devastating. Can't see how people get joy or fun out of being horrid. I can't say I picked it up from anyone. Once caned a boy. What I did hurt me more. Influences my behaviour. Community and the idea of Argument. Typically Jewish. Bearing guilt, having feelings that go on and on for ever. Not forgiving. And Jewish humour."*

*"Yes, conscious, yes influence - my upbringing, sit up straight. Most of me directly from my family. School, not grandparents. Year in state school. Different Public schools - UK model."*

*"Yes, I think my code of behaviour rests with my spiritual well-being. Yes I try to be a role model of what I believe."*

*"Methodist gave me a grounding, particularly in the community. Spirituality community and God, my background. Quaker that there is god within each person - that's my code."*

*"Yes throughout my life. [pause] Combined home and church influences. Everything in that code comes from realising what you sow you reap. If you create difficulties and unhappiness then it will come back to you. That is my Christian teaching. Do to others as you would have them do unto you - really important."*

*"Be harmless. Do no unnecessary harm or pain that is my code."*

*"Yes. But particularly our care for our children and grandchildren."*

*"The Lord's Prayer - I use it to calm me down, but I also use water. Sometimes a shower - lots of hot water, but sometimes going to the beach and looking at the sea."*

It had been hoped by the research team that those interviewed would provide a clear picture of how their codes of behaviour had influenced their lives and their answers would provide signals that could be used when the research team conducted phase two interviews with young people. For example, we expected to find that the codes of behaviour were almost always based on the interviewees' childhood learning from home, church, community organisations, synagogue, temple or mosque would give a clear picture of current behaviours and codes generally. This was the case in only 44% of the interviewees.

While 44% discussed their childhood learning as being really important, the other interviewees discussed their experiences of learning codes as children in a light hearted way, remembering having to go to church, Sunday school or religious learning a duty. Several even suggesting that being sent to church or Sunday school was a punishment. Others referred to specific codes like "*the Ten Commandments*", "*The Lord's Prayer*", and "*love your neighbour as oneself*", but unexpectedly 20% of interviewees talked about the way the church and other community organisations had tried to control them and what they saw as a lack of "*honesty and truthfulness*" on the part of pastors or priests.

While the quotes above show the extent to which the interviewees had been influenced in their formative behaviour, few attributed this to their belief systems.

There could have been reasons for the lack of depth in this part of the interview. Two likely reasons they could be that:

- a) some of the interviewees were tired towards the end of the interview and didn't wish to talk in depth.
- b) the interviewees just hadn't thought about the topic and as the rest of their answers had been clear and knowledgeable, this was an area where their codes were so entrenched in them that they were not questioned.

One possible conclusion could be that for the 44% who benefitted from early "religious teaching", it was helpful and influenced their later lives. For these interviewees it also provided them with tools that enabled them to be resilient in times of crisis<sup>41</sup>.

It also appeared that having "belonged to a religious community of some kind" or a community organisation (like Boy Scouts or Girl Guides) had taught the participants about getting on with neighbours, respect and caring about society in general, and had provided some kind of social connectedness.

Belonging to a community and contributing to social capital was also acknowledged. For interviewees who believed that this was important, their codes included a sense of belonging, particularly a belonging to their families and their communities, sometimes to their clubs and their arts and craft groups, but less often to their religious organisations.

50% of interviewees noted that it was their codes of behaviour that led to their community awareness, some of which stemmed from the youth groups they had belonged to as children or from Sunday schools. "*Loving one's neighbour as oneself*" seemed particularly important, even to those who had rejected religion and said they didn't believe in God.

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<sup>41</sup> See also Section 3.4

### 3.4 Coping and crisis situations

Quotes from interviewees in regard to coping with crisis situations

*"There are two kinds of crisis; there are the crisis situation where you can do something, you can act –[and] then there are the kind of crisis where there is nothing I can do. I behave differently in each case."*

*"I want to be by myself – I usually go to the sea."*

*"I used to use a Buddhist meditation, but now I have got into Daoism, sometimes I go to a friend."*

*"I have a spiritual need. I think when people find themselves in a hole – they look for answers. That is spiritual awareness – about who we are? Your belief gets you through."*

*"I use my writing. I write a journal, I have for 15 to 20 years – I write about what has happened – pages, pages and pages. That keeps me sane."*

*"If I am angry I chant and keep chanting. I use a very special mantra, I chant over and over, it helps me to get calm."*

*"I have a little god at home that I can go to and I pray and meditate with it".*

*"Go to the place inside me this is very still. That is where I withdraw."*

*"I sit back and discuss it with my husband. This is the best thing to do. But in the end of the day what we both agree happens. We share."*

*"I thought God would help but when the baby died I just gave up – I just couldn't cope and was bitter with God, I haven't returned to God."*

*"Walk on the beach, by a lake, in the country, in the bush, up a mountain."*

*"Want to be by myself – I usually go to the sea."*

*"Something gets you through – it wasn't the church."*

*"I just had to work through things – I tried a lot of things including Buddhist meditation."*

*"I always remember going to Island Bay and just sitting on the beach – I knew I had to make a decision and I couldn't make the decision so I had to talk to myself... I was like being paralysed. I still remember going along the beach and then just sitting on the wharf. I then got the feeling I could decide."*

*"Still small voice – you have to call on it. Then you call on your instincts and that trains you to act. That is how my family survived from the Nazi crisis."*

*"I work it out with my husband, family or friends."*

*"Think it out, with friends, by myself, with family particularly husband or partner."*

*"I didn't cope."*

*"I used drugs, alcohol, switched off, became depressed – that lasted six months."*

*"If things go wrong I have to do something to make me feel good – I would go to Taupo and sit on my own in a hot pool."*

*"I wander down to the local café and get a coffee."*

*"Crisis – I burst into tears."*

"Once something has happened it has happened it is not possible to dwell on that – I have to get on and concentrate on what is going to happen, not what has happened in the past."

"Read, do art, music and poetry, become active."

"I felt like a little boy lost and I prayed."

"Even when he wasn't there [God] I prayed and used the Scriptures."

"Meditate, I am connected to myself – I had dreams sometimes – tuning into a higher consciousness, I also used music, art, poetry, writing and walk on the beach."

"I have changed, differently at different times – recently I have believed in prayer– it is a way to focus my thoughts."

"Walking in the bush is a spiritual experience. Beach and bush is spiritual. I could feel those who died there. [I] Went away on my own. Tiny place and I walked on the beach. All along the coast. I talked to the sea, myself – my pride. Let everything out. Ask myself questions. What I thought of myself. I was OK – I was intelligent. Good friend also helped. I did meditate. I think I could call it that. My mind always goes – I also drank a lot."

"Alcohol, Poetry, Music. Can see the garden and the roses of my childhood. Can't pray for the moment. Do meditate."

"Hospice helped, I took myself into a glass of wine – and it was so hard."

"I couldn't even move. Drips and nurses. Gradual people got me through. My son [named] came over. Everything gray – try to snap out of it. Go to Pool – aqua jogging. Volunteer work at Library. Family Friends. Pray yes I think so."

"Pray, talk with the children."

"Community is important. [pause] [I] Repeat mantra, focussing my thoughts away from a negative, [it is ] a psychological tool, to take my mind on a different course. Strange did at one stage think when I was a muddle, I was a possibility that I might die. [I was] Really, really worried. Then out of the blue I felt really great. Puzzled by [my] reaction, that good moods or bad moods - out of the blue. Very positive suddenly.

[I was] Very upset, didn't believe, found that I was more affected than I expected. Suddenly in the toilet I would burst into tears about my father. [pause] Awareness. At University had a breakdown – a girl of course. Suddenly got over it and bought a book on Zen Buddhism."

"I don't no not really. I just do something. Tried to meditate and tried, in the end [I] do a shopping list. Deep breathing if I can't sleep. Lot of laughter. [pause] Making lists."

"Yes we use Pray both to the Christian and Maori Gods, particularly for exorcism. [Story told, sacred and in respect not included]. [There was] extensive use of prayer and purification, listening to the Tupuna and to the person who had died. [pause] Sacredness was included. [I] had to keep people calm. Always Karakia [prayer] before trips and when we arrive."

"Pray every morning and every evening. Pray for the spirits help. Everything should be all right. Must thank God for the day that has happened. Sixteen days of prayer after someone dies. Pray for the soul to go to another place. Where the soul is going. Pray for 16 or 13 days"

"Yes I write and t the writing makes me access to truth."

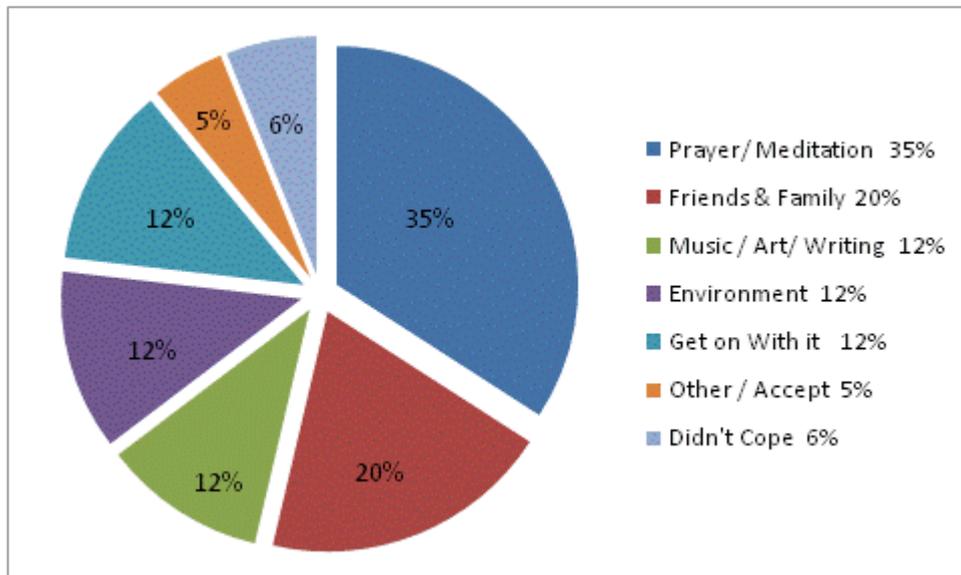
*"Prayers, individual and group prayers. You follow. Don't chant. No music; that is not allowed. I was sad, then did ablution, then read the Koran. It is from Allah so accept."*

*"If necessary I think [pause] usually go by myself, talk to family my son or my daughter and of course my children. Not many deep friends. Just get on with it."*

*"I wander down road, [pause] single minded purpose in life. No distraction and no way I can change my view."*

*"Meditate and pray, can do anything, be careful. Can't pray negatively, if I am really down, and only to be helpful. White light, I use to cover the person, but fear of black magic if praying for selfish goal. Meditation like drug without the after affect. [pause] Drawing and painting a picture you are in meditation. Dreams are also important at these times."*

### How do you cope?



An important part of the interview was related to how interviewees coped with a crisis. The question was prefaced with the comment that this is an important part of the interview and that we were hoping that the answers to this question would inform the phase two of the questionnaire. We were wondering if older people drew on their spiritual well-being in times of crisis.

The interviewees were then asked to describe a crisis, and then asked how they reacted.

The answers fitted into the following categories:

- a) Prayer, meditation, turned to Koran or Bible, recited a mantra.
- b) Just got on with it/action, working it out for themselves/by themselves.
- c) Turned to the environment; walk on beach, bush, up mountain.
- d) Turned to the arts, particularly playing or listening to music, reading or writing poetry or a journal, and painting.
- e) Worked out a plan of action with partner, family, community or friends.
- f) Didn't cope – used alcohol, had breakdown
- g) Acceptance and drawing on inner strength

A third of interviewees mentioned several different ways they coped and noted that sometimes it depended on the situation. Such as walking on the beach as they prayed, talking and praying with a partner or listening to music as they worked out how to act.

One of the interviewees noted that there are crisis situations which require action and others where you can't go and help. This distinction was not made in the interview question so the answers tended to cover situations where action was required.

#### **a. Prayer, Bible, Koran or meditation**

35% of the interviewees turned to prayer, meditated or recited some kind of mantra. The prayers were not always for help and guidance, they were often used as a way to calm down. One interviewee said that the prayers helped him "*centre himself in a spirit world*"<sup>42</sup>. This centring was useful, as it enabled the individual to calm down and control his thinking and then he was better able to cope and get through the crisis.

#### **b. Just get on with it/action/work it out by myself**

12% of the interviewees said they "*just get on with it*", "*make a list*" or "*just get in the car and go and help*". Occasionally these people "*go to the place inside me which is very still, that is where I withdraw to work out the issues*"<sup>43</sup>. While those who prayed sometimes also acted in a similar way, they consulted God first and then acted.

#### **c. The Environment**

The next most frequently suggested actions in times of trouble involved the environment.

*"I walk on the beach", "I drove down to the bottom of Wairarapa and then I walked and walked on the wild beach – My ego had been so damaged – but by the sea everything came back into perspective"*<sup>44</sup>.

12% of interviewees said that in times of crisis they sought out the water, particularly mentioning the beach, the sea, the bush, mountains and the country. Walking and thinking on their own until they found answers to the crisis or could cope again.

*"I have to go to water – usually Lake Taupo – Water is so cleansing – then I can act again."*<sup>45</sup>

*"For me it is about being in a place that gives me something. For me I find Oamaru a spiritual place – an exciting place – it gives me something emotional. My father came from there I can go there."*<sup>46</sup>

The environment appeared to give a place for reflection, a place to work things out alone, where interviewees occasionally talked indirectly to a god, guardian or a spirit, but more often just sorted out issues on their own.

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<sup>42</sup> From interviewee from Kapiti Coast

<sup>43</sup> From interviewees in Waikato, Taranaki, Wellington and Kapiti Coast

<sup>44</sup> From interviewee from Kapiti Coast

<sup>45</sup> From interviewee from Wellington

<sup>46</sup> From interviewee from Wellington

#### **d. The Arts – music and literature.**

*"I go to my room and put on music – [put on] usually Jazz, but sometimes classical music. Has to be music that I love."<sup>47</sup>*

11% of the interviewees turned to the arts to relieve stress and cope with a crisis. They played music or listened to music. Sometimes they sang, sometimes played the piano, and sometimes used the stereo. *"I certainly use music and that is spiritual."* Of this 11%, 6% used literature to cope in a crisis. They wrote poems and read poems. They also wrote in a journal. Only one interviewee mentioned the visual arts, and she painted and did her knitting in order to cope.

#### **e. Work it out by myself or with family friends**

The interviewees who worked things out by themselves or with family and friends included both those who believed in God and those who did not. They were people whose answers to all questions were community based. They went and discussed a crisis with their spouse, as in the quote above, or with friends (their community).

*"I remember I turned up at the Vicarage – it was 11pm at night. We drank the communion wine and talked I needed that – I never thanked him – he died an alcoholic"<sup>48</sup>.*

#### **f. Didn't cope**

6% of the interviewees said that they had fallen apart after a crisis, particularly after a sudden death (more particularly that of a husband, child or sister). Some interviewees said that they had gone into depression for a few days, a few weeks or, in one case, for six months. 4% of the interviewees who claimed not to have coped noted that they had used prescription drugs, illegal drugs, and alcohol in response to a crisis. One interviewee had been admitted to hospital having had a breakdown

#### **g. Acceptance and drawing on inner strength coping**

There were a few coping mechanisms that were mentioned by one interviewee, but they were used effectively. These mechanisms were:

- a) Focussing on positive thoughts and away from negatives,
- b) Calling on inner strength, and going to a place within oneself,
- c) Accepting that the crisis was the will of God, Allah or part of one's path to the next life.

It was also in this part of the interview that 6% of interviewees talked about cooking and gardening and, in one case, golf as mechanisms that enabled them to calm down and then cope with the crisis.

Interviewees were asked to tell a story about a time of crisis in their lives, and they described situations as diverse as experiences in World War II, death of partners or children, serious illness for themselves or a loved one, redundancy, and divorce.

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<sup>47</sup> Interviewee from Waikato

<sup>48</sup> Interviewee from Taranaki

## General Comment

Interviewees were asked to describe a crisis and how they reacted to this crisis. 74% mentioned several actions that helped their coping including prayer, a walk on the beach, making a list or consulting with friends. In the analysis therefore percentages are only a guide and represent the dominant way the interviewee acted, but it is important to recognise that interviewees did call on a mix of mechanisms depending on the crisis and whether they could influence the outcome or not. They prayed, acted, walked on the beach, listened to music, gardened or talked to friends and families and "*hit a few golf balls around*"<sup>49</sup>.

The interviewees were elderly, so they had had a life-time of experiences. They acknowledged that they acted differently in different situations and had a range of ways they responded and coped. The interviewees were not asked if the action had helped, but many did say that they found an answer to a problem when walking on beaches, during prayer and that meditation calmed them down so they could think clearly about how to act.

While the interviewees were asked for one crisis and how they had reacted, many gave several, and then gave several answers.

The conclusion was that most of the participants had learnt to cope, about half drawing their strength from their religion, their God or through prayer and meditation. A third of others only coped when they had either gone off on their own and thought about the crisis, walked, gardened, wrote poetry or a journal and then they coped. Some interviewees did all or some of the above. Community and family were important for 20% of the interviewees. Many of the elderly people had taught themselves how to cope using prayer or their own resilience; they managed most of the time, at least a 50% only turning to family and friends if absolutely necessary.

A significant number of the situations recounted by the interviewees were profound, tragic and involved grief and then resiliency. Several participants told their stories with tears in their eyes, and two other interviewees actually wept when discussing the crisis. The stories were moving and personal, and the interviewees' confidentiality is respected in this report. The next question was "How did you cope?", and this was what the research team really wanted to know. The answers, as reported in the quotes above, were mixed.

Possibly a flaw in the interview format was that the answers were, as requested, about the specific situations described. While these answers are significant and could be used as comparisons when interviews are conducted with young people, they do not give the complete picture. They don't tell us, for example, how these elderly people cope with day-to-day crises or stressful situations.

The 20% that involved drawing on family, community and friends were possibly the most moving. These wonderful older people shared many stories of love, humility, selflessness and the ability to drop everything if the children or grandchildren were in trouble. The elderly that were interviewed all had what could be called a 'toolbox' of skills and strategies that enabled them to cope. These tools included prayers, meditation and chanting manta, writing lists, listening to music, jumping into the car and going to help, while at the same time 'getting on with it' or walking on the beach or into the bush to collect their thoughts.

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<sup>49</sup> Interviewee from Taranaki

### 3.5 Religion: Do you belong?

Quotes from interviewees in relation to any membership of religious organisations, temples, churches or mosques now or in the past.

*"Yes, Go to Anglican Church." (3 interviewees)*

*"Yes, but don't go to the temple every Friday, I am a Hindu."*

*"Was Baptist, now expressing it as Anglican."*

*"I'm an Agnostic. Never belonged to a group... I am angry with religion. A deep anger [about] the damage the churches and missionaries have done around the world. The damage far outweighs the good. The Catholic Church – what they did to cultures. Look at what was done to the Incas. I say don't let a missionary get close to them. Anger towards Churches – Churches and Spirituality two different matters."*

*"Left [Roman Catholic] Church, they were doing renovations – the Priest said we are having a 5 pound Sunday – I wasn't making much more than 5 pounds – he was asking almost a week's salary for me. Didn't think the church should be a trading centre. Someone then said I wasn't a Christian because I didn't go to church. I challenged him; it was 11pm at night, 'why are you not with your children and wife?'."*

*"Can see that some people need something to hold on to in devastated lives. I understand that and that they get some sense of it but for me the fact that any of those faiths can claim to be the only right one. This eliminates all religion. I love the Buddhists because they are open. I quite like the Jews. Don't become a Jew."*

*"I am now Agnostic, before then a Roman Catholic, now nothing. I'm Gnostic – I have studied every religion – seen their guidelines. I go to the Theosophical Society, there is no dogma – philosophy of whatever. All religion is man made. People get tunnel vision and I get frustrated – they are not trying to teach, they are try to get people to understand and move away. They have a narrow way that they think."*

*"I was Christian, now maybe moving towards Buddhist. Maybe I am a free thinker. Don't go to church, have a Christmas tree. Feeling of giving. Atmosphere of benevolence. Christian influenced behaviour. Our behaviour don't steal, Christian values. I am becoming a Buddhist."*

*"My father was an alcoholic and my father beat my mother. The church was meant to be my safety zone. Nuns treated me as an outsider. I was ashamed of who I was – I wasn't allowed to speak Maori. It took a long time to get out of that. Not till I did my Bachelor degree in counselling did I stop being ashamed of my past."*

During interviews when the questions turned to religion, the body language and the discussion changed, moving from pleasant, enjoyable communication to tense, formal communication styles and, in several cases, anger. In 6% of cases the interviewees became distressed and recounted stories that had led to their distrust and disillusionment of the church. While two of these were in regard to birth control, the other example relayed involved a particular church which demanded a significant proportion of his salary at a time when his family were hungry.

Another 16% of interviewees expressed a deep resentment, but not anger with religion and the churches generally. 20% noted that they would not go to a church again except for funerals, and 6% of the interviewees said they didn't even go to churches for a funeral even if they were of friends or family.

The Buddhists and the Quakers appeared to be the only religions who had increased numbers with 10% of interviewees having moved their church attendance from Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist to Buddhist and Quaker forms of worship. Only one of the 3 interviewees who had been brought up Roman Catholic still belonged to that church. The Muslims, Hindus and the Pacific Island Presbyterian interviewees were certainly the clearest about their beliefs and their religious affiliation – all having been brought up in the religion that they still attended. Even though in one case her attendance at the temple was not a regular thing she still saw herself as Hindu and followed many of the rituals of that faith.

### **3.6 Identity/self esteem/unique**

Quotes from interviewees in regard to their identity and self esteem

#### **Does your spirituality make you special?**

*"Getting an award at the investitures made me know I can do more – not my spirituality."*

*"No my creator made me unique and my spirituality is part of me."*

*"Don't agree that we are all special. Everyone is special to some people. Immediate circle. Special to myself. No I live by my ethics. Strictly within that. But being special – No."*

*"Friends make me special and help me. Spirituality has always helped me".*

*"My children are [special] - no not me not now – no not special – not my spirituality anyway."*

*"Yes that is about my deep sense of faith."*

*"No, we all go back to God, no one more important, we teach our grandsons and it is so important. 13 sisters. 16 brothers and sisters. Now we are only have 3. Not more special."*

*"I feel special in my relationship with God. To myself. [pause] Life doesn't get me down."*

*"But not with the Church. I don't think I am special. I have this dilemma they say I am Kuia – I am too young and my sisters they are Kuia. [older wise woman]"*

*"Everyone is unique. Reincarnation makes us unique."*

The question relating to identity and being special appeared to be the hardest one to answer in the questionnaire. 10% of the older people asked what I meant by the question and why it was relevant to a research on spiritual well-being.

The answers above were from 20% of the interviewees who did respond to the question. For the other 80% the question was left out or if asked and the interviewee didn't answer the interviewer moved onto the next question.

Those who did answer the question didn't think they were particularly special. One respondent saying that this is a new concept created by younger people and she didn't wish to engage in this particular debate that she felt was a waste of time<sup>50</sup>.

The 12% of interviewees who believed in reincarnation were the only ones to answer this question with enthusiasm and almost passion, but another interviewee was equally assertive that she disagreed with the whole idea. One 72 year old school teacher<sup>51</sup> who still taught on a relief basis spoke of not agreeing with the Department of Education's emphasis on "being special" and on everyone being special.

In response to this question, four of the interviewees talked about respect and caring for others in the community and about equity. It had been hoped that some would talk about a New Zealand identity, but this did not crop up.

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<sup>50</sup> Interviewee from New Plymouth

<sup>51</sup> Interviewee from Kapiti Coast

### 3.7 Spiritual experiences

#### Quotes from interviewees about spiritual experiences

*"An old fellow came to me, we were at a function. He told me to look after his wife. When turned around the old fellow had disappeared. I could describe him. Nobody had seen him. When everyone left she was all by herself and we asked her to come with us to Hamilton. I knew I had to do that – I knew we had to support her, she was his widow and really needed help." "[the old fellow", he implied was a ghost]*

*"I could smell her talcum powder, I knew she was there; she was in the car beside me." [Discussing his wife who had died]*

*"Suddenly there was a breeze, we knew it was him communicating with us [at a tangi]. We realised we had placed the casket in the wrong way."*

*"I had had the blood tests – it was serious and we were waiting for the results and I was driving in my car. As you can imagine I was really worried. Then all of a sudden I was peaceful. It was like a wave. I knew I was going to be all right." [Abridged]*

*"The spirit walks with me on the beach – she guides me – she is [name artist from last century]. I know who she is and she is my guardian."*

*"My daughter was so ill, but I was out in the country. They had to operate and it was late at night. It was exactly 11pm. I knew the operation had been a success and she was going to get better. No-one had to tell me. I just knew."*

*"Sometimes when you are in heritage buildings in Europe you feel amazing. You know the place is sacred."*

*"I use white light. I cover the person in white light and the negative turns to positive" [abridged part of story about a situation of road rage associated with a parking place]*

*"I really wanted to be in [place names]. We prayed and prayed. We had been watching and watching "grabaseat"<sup>52</sup> but nothing. Then suddenly I was offered a place in a friend's car going there and they were going the next day."*

*"The dogs tried to stop me going to work that day." (A story of an accident later in the day at work, and how the warning from the dogs helped him be more aware and that saved his life.)*

*"I stood in the old cathedral and the art was awesome – it was a spiritual moment."*

*"Ground zero - I felt the other buildings. There was such peace all around [pause] The road - someone was looking after those who lived. This was a truly spiritual moment"*

*"I was in England when Lady Diana was killed. [pause] Never seen the grief - so moving. People crying openly. [wasn't the same] Outside Britain. Not*

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<sup>52</sup> Grabaseat – is an Air New Zealand cheap ticket promotion

*mass hysteria - very moving. Signing books<sup>53</sup> was awesome and there was an extraordinary and spiritual feeling."*

*"Special moment – I remember when I first went to the UK and met the remnants of my family. That had an effect on me. We need to know where we come from. This is important."*

*"It was in 1978 when I went for Hajj with my husband. The first sight of Kába (the house of worship built by prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail) had me spell-bound. I can not describe in words my true feelings. I was struck with awe - that I was actually there where I dreamt to be<sup>54</sup>."*

What was noticeable in the research was that 45% of interviewees had had significant experiences that they were only able to describe in terms of a spiritual in nature. Many of these experiences had had the effect of changing the life of the interviewee.

The experiences fell into a range of categories and broadly they included:

**a. Experiencing an intervention in their lives that they believed was from something supernatural.**

20% of the older people interviewed discussed an unexplained supernatural experience. In one example this intervention gave the interviewee the strength to climb a steep cliff to get help when his wife was injured. On three occasions the intervention was in the form of something supernatural pulled or pushing them away from danger when there was no-one else around. In several cases warning had come in the form which told the interviewee or someone close to them to act (e.g. go to a doctor and seek professional help before the symptoms of a serious had even emerged). Two incidents involved warnings or support from animals or a bird<sup>55</sup>.

**b. Having a prayer answered**

There was a considerable difference in the way interviewees understood, used and believed in the role of prayer in their lives. 35% used it both as a calming mechanism and as a way to seek direction. Only about 10% believed that they should ask God, Jesus, Spirits, tupuna or Ghosts to get them out of difficult situations. Although with a degree of humour 6% of interviewees did admit to have prayed that they should win the lottery, got a job, found a partner. Two of the interviewees believed that asking God for help was a bad thing. One noting that *"one should be careful what you ask as it might not be the best path for you in the future<sup>56</sup>"*

**c. Experiencing a special calm at a time of crisis that appeared to be supernatural**

During two of the interviews, the interviewees reported a kind of 'calm and peace' that had descended on them<sup>57</sup>. These experiences happened unexpectedly. One of these experiences occurred while the person was worrying about an operation that was being performed on her daughter, a long way away. The interviewee experienced the calm at the moment her daughter ceased to be in danger. The

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<sup>53</sup> Books of remembrance were placed all over England

<sup>54</sup> Written note send after interview describing spiritual moment

<sup>55</sup> These interviewees were from Waikato, Taranaki, Kapiti Coast and Wellington

<sup>56</sup> Interviewee from Taranaki

<sup>57</sup> Interviewee from Waikato and Taranaki

second experience was while the interviewee was driving in a car, worrying about medical test results. The calm moment occurred at the moment that the tests were found to be negative, but the interview didn't find this out until quite a while later. Both interviewees described this feeling of calm and peace as supernatural and 'extra-ordinary'. They knew all was now well.

#### **d. Meeting a relative or friend after they had died**

12% of interviewees<sup>58</sup> described visits from husbands, wives, mothers, and close friends who had died and how these visits had support them. It appears that for many people, the finality of death is hard to understand and people find different ways to come to terms with it. Talking to the loved one who has died was extremely real for these interviewees. Several of the experiences described included details of smelling the person's perfume, cigarette, or feeling them hold them. The interviewees who gave descriptions of these visits from dead friends and close relatives found comfort, and all spoke of the way these visits had brought them peace and acceptance of the death.

#### **e. Communicating with a spirit/ghost/tupuna**

The supernatural experiences of some of the interviewees were associated with talking to or spending time with tupuna (ancestors), guardians, spirits, ghosts or friends of family, or strangers who had died. There were 8% of the interviewees who had had experiences of this kind, and another 4% who thought that they might have seen a ghost or spirit.

These experiences were real to the person who had had the experience, guided the way in which they behaved and also appeared to influence their codes of behaviour, particularly how they treated fellow human beings and animals.

#### **f. Being awed by a religious event, great art or music**

8% of interviewees discussed visits to places in Europe and the influence that this had had on them, which they described as spiritual. Another 8% discussed moments in religious ceremonies that they had experienced as truly spiritual. A visit to Mecca was described as a significant spiritual moment. The ceremonies and the awe of some religious events certainly provided spiritual well-being to many of those who were believers; times when they came close to their God.

One interviewee noted that his music was part of his spirit.

*"The most spiritual times are when [I experience] the beauty of the environment. Just seeing the hills, the sea and being awed by the beauty. And yes also music – sometimes at a concert, or just hearing music that lifts your soul<sup>59</sup>."*

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<sup>58</sup> Half of these interviewees came from the Waikato, others from Wellington, Taranaki and Kapiti Coast

<sup>59</sup> Interviewee from Wellington

### 3.8 Role of ceremonies in spiritual well-being

#### Quotes about the role of ceremonies in spiritual well-being

*"I went to ceremony for the new grandchild in Sydney – that was meaningful."*

*"Church on Sunday morning. [pause] Liked seeing that high school boys are now attending. Clergyman talked about fear of the Lord. Go because I think it is important – it makes a difference."*

*"I conducted a funeral which I shared with Maori elder. It was for a young man and we had modern music. Connections were important. The Beach Boys music was just right."*

*"Yes funeral – time of celebration – or should be."*

*"I go to a lot of secular funerals." "Secular funerals often celebrate the life of a person – I like that."*

*"My daughter's best friend died. Requiem Mass. Long drawn out, terrible singing. Because I had to go. It was an obligation."*

*"Strangely [it was when I went to] a Maori funeral. Young friend – lovely man. The tangi. Different. Sensible – Spiritual event. Moving a word for spiritual."*

*"Some funerals very meaningful. My mother's yes."*

*"I go to Tangi and then Pacific Island singing as well – wonderful."*

*"Funerals – I talk mentally with them [the person who has died] and help them on their way."*

*"Going to a ceremony – I do not go willingly."*

*"Go to church on Sundays." (3 interviewees)*

*"Last weekend [I went to] a church parade [pause] fire brigade. Wonderful in Mathews in the field. Amazing sound and singing recorded. Wonderful Music and movement beauty in Liturgy - Anglo-catholic."*

*"Spiritual moments in church. The light comes through the window. Rituals – influenced me. In Israel we had an Arab man as our guide. He talked about the Palestine/Jew situation. He took us to the Well of Abraham, then he baptised me. The cleansing power of the ceremony in Arabic was amazing." [Abridged]*

*"Also once attended reconciliation as a Catholic ceremony. It was a thing about the past – words and absolution announced. Priest lays hand on me. Wonderful I gain from it – it did bring peace."*

*"Love the Christmas ceremony at the Church. Everyone together. The community so important. No other ceremony ever gave me uplift. Not keen on rituals."*

*"Enjoy tradition Church service – like a good sing and like the words, been to funerals that are just the full church service and most unsatisfactory. But also attended wonderful ceremonies where the person was celebrated."*

*"Candles – the lighting of them on Friday night – that is the women's role, women bring light into the home. We do this every week - Friday the candle lighting ceremony is so important. The Holy moment at the Sabbath. A truly special moment."*

*"Every year we meet with all our brothers and sisters. Ties between brother and sister. Sister brings little red bands – she ties it and puts out some*

*fruit. With brother and others, there are sweets to eat. Sister kisses – then brother has to tell his sister – I look after you for life. Your life must be long. Wherever the brother is he will find the sister – where ever over the sea. He sends her the band if he can't get there.” (Hindu ceremony)*

*“Once a year milk boiling ceremony and other ceremonies. We put a lot of things on the fire in the house – for the spirits, rice sugar, honey and herbs and burn them – all the things that smell – bad things go out and good things come in.”*

*“We had a silent retreat I am very busy trying to be spiritual. Then ordained as deacon and we had a service of foot washing. Heads of the church washed our feet, so powerful. [pause] Moving whole thing.”*

*“I am a Free Mason since 1964 Religious overtones. Christchurch biennial and it was opened to the public. Very formal. It installed the Grand Master. Discipline in the order very disciplined.”*

*“Yes – I want a celebration of people, I want trumpets.”*

Interviewees were asked to describe a ceremony that the interviewee had attended. It was anticipated that responses to this could well provide the research team with extra insights into how the interviewee expressed or experienced their spiritual well-being. For 30% of interviewees, this enlightenment was real and extremely meaningful, comforting and for them intensely spiritual. Some of the above quotes show how these ceremonies influenced those who attended. There were many more responses of this kind.

Those who did attend ceremonies were also likely to say they went in order to meet with friends or the community, but others went with the intention of praying, listening, or taking part in the music. 4% of interviewees mentioned stained glass windows and 10% mentioned music and singing associated with ceremonies.

However, the number of interviewees attending regularly ceremonies was relatively small, 10% at most. This appeared considerably low considering the interview sample was gained from people who were interested in belief systems and also the number who had said they believed in God, Higher Beings and spiritual experiences.

10% of those who didn't regularly attend church or religious ceremonies had visited cathedrals, temples and mosques while travelling overseas and these experiences had had a profound effect on them and their thinking about spiritual well-being. One interviewee<sup>60</sup> talked about an experience in Israel and a ceremony conducted by an Arab tourist guide, and expressed surprise that it had moved him so much and because here was an Arab talking about Christian places of religious significance. It had changed his thinking about the politics of Israel and Palestine – this was an intensely moving story. (See quotation at the beginning of this section).

While there were people who had 'spiritual experiences' in churches, sometimes associated with ceremonies, these were as often in old cathedrals in Europe as when they went to a church on their own. Coventry cathedral and churches in France were mentioned as examples by three interviewees, as were the churches of South America by another one. Even those who didn't believe in God did find

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<sup>60</sup> Interviewee from Wellington

large Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic buildings moving and beautiful and certainly found them to be an important part of their international travels.

In the Waikato two of the interviewees always attended a weekly prayer meeting on a Friday morning this ceremony was described as deeply spiritual and provided support to all who attended. This weekly event was certainly a significant event in the lives of those who attended providing the interviewees with a spiritual dimension in their lives

The ceremonies that had the most meaning for our interviewees tended to be those associated with life stages (naming ceremonies, bar mitzvah, marriages, funerals or tangi) and spiritual voyages, and particularly ceremonies that involved members of their family (partners, parents, grandchildren children and sisters).

Described by interviewees as meaningful were also a visits to Mecca and attending tangi (both Pakeha and Maori discussed experiences at tangi), a Hindu wedding, a Bar Mitzvah and Jewish Circumcision (although the circumcision did produce considerable distress to the person attending).

Probably because of the age of the interviewees, there was a lot of discussion about funerals. Interviewees would say they go to *"too many funerals"* Three of the older men were articulate about not liking the traditional church funeral. They wanted to celebrate the person who had died and learn more about them. They considered that the best funerals were when there was what they called a mix, music, a prayer and people, not too many talking about their friend, colleague, or family member. Two mentioned ceremonies that had been held in Old St Paul's in Wellington where the person who had died was, in their views really celebrated for who they were and what they had done, in a solemn setting. One person had just attended a full Roman Catholic Requiem mass and had not been impressed. This interviewee commented that anyone could have been in the coffin and there was nothing to link with the person, this friend or his life<sup>61</sup>.

The quotations at the beginning of this section tell the story in the voices for the interviewees. They show again the diversity of experiences that our interviewees shared, and also the rich ceremonies observed by a range of different religions.

### **3.9. Other findings**

#### **a. Activities – walking by the water, climbing hills and enjoying the environment.**

One of the surprise findings of this research was the number of people who saw their relationship with spirituality as something to do with the environment and activities associated with aspects of nature. Anything to do with water was high on the list. Being by the sea, a lake or a river, or aspects of these places – waves, a waterfall, the wind on the water – calmed people and provided them with a place to think, pause and "recharge batteries". Interviewees also associated their spirituality with sunsets, sunrise and the awe of nature generally.

*"I have to go down to the sea at Raglan – I have to see the waves – the bigger and wilder the waves the better – they cleanse my mind and give me peace<sup>62</sup>."*

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<sup>61</sup> Kapiti Coast Interviewee

<sup>62</sup> Waikato interviewee

Walking was seen as an answer to coping with stress, to working out problems and with spirituality for 10% of those interviewed. It is therefore an important finding. This walking was sometimes on ones own, but as often with other people. One of the Kapiti Coast interviewees mentioned walking on the beach with her guardian or angel, while another walked up hills and on the beach with her husband, chanting a mantra or prayer to calm her down if she is angry or had a problem to solve. One other interviewee walked on the beach when she needed to talk to her husband (who had died many years before).

Only once was sport mentioned, and this was rugby. This interviewee said that he liked to throw a rugby ball when he was down, "*but not now [pause] I feel too old*"<sup>63</sup>

Another interviewee talked of cooking in regard to spirituality

*"Spirituality certainly has environmental links – I think it is also about comfort. Comfortable food – I love making a curry and an omelette. Spiritual things [for me] are comfort things."*<sup>64</sup>

### **b. Music and poetry**

22% of interviewees would mention their relationship with music and occasionally poetry, 11% saying they used music or the arts when coping with times of crisis. For some of these there was also a close association between music and their descriptions of spirituality, creation, angels, ways of coping with stress, and as something they learnt as a child that gives them strength or is associated with times of pleasure and relaxation.

*"Oh for me spirituality is music. When I am down [I say to myself] "what music shall I listen to"*<sup>65</sup>

Interviewees associated spirituality with the music of other people, with listening to music, but also with performing music themselves, particularly singing. 6% belonged to a choirs and one interviewee belonged to an orchestra. 4% mentioned writing poetry and writing. One interviewee writing a journal and two interviewees discussed the poetry they wrote and how important this was for their spiritual well-being.

### **c. Finding a reason for the unexplained**

*"Spiritual [pause]– I think it is a basic belief in some other way. Explaining things that are not obviously explained"*<sup>66</sup>

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed personal spirituality as journeys that enable them to find answers to aspects of their lives that were not easily explained by science, reason or their other experiences. They therefore turned to spirituality and the supernatural to give them the answers.

*"I have a spiritual need. I think when people find themselves in a hole – they look for answers. That is spiritual awareness about who we are?"*

This was particularly the case with the 10% of interviewees who believed that searching for the unexplained included a belief in some kind of reincarnation<sup>67</sup>. It

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<sup>63</sup> Wellington interviewee

<sup>64</sup> Wellington interviewee

<sup>65</sup> Wellington interviewee

<sup>66</sup> Taranaki interviewee

<sup>67</sup> Interviewees from Wellington, Taranaki, Kapiti Coast and Waikato

was inconceivable to some of them that they would cease to exist when they died. Whether it was that their "soul" would continue in its present form and their personality with it, or that they would come back to earth again in a different form with a different personality depended on the perspective of the individual interviewee.

These 5 interviewees were calmer and acted as if they were more *"in control"* of their lives. 3 of them had been searching for a spiritual path for many years, and one of the interviewees had tried Judaism, Christianity (Anglican and Methodist churches) and was now exploring Buddhism<sup>68</sup>. Another interviewee had come to Buddhism through Roman Catholicism, and yet another had tried various Christian paths and was now exploring a mix of Seven Day Adventist and Gateway churches<sup>69</sup>.

10% of interviewees had explored, or were exploring the Buddhist, Quaker and Sufi disciplines, and felt that they were still on a path to *'spiritual enlightenment'*<sup>70</sup>. These interviewees talked about this spiritual journey which wasn't in their opinions related to religion, but was relating to their spiritual well-being.

The interviewer asked interviewees to describe a 'spiritual moment'.

74% of those interviewed had had at least one experience they considered to be a 'spiritual' experience. 50% of these older people discussed more than one spiritual experience. These included being *"visited by a spirit, ancestor or angel"* – gaining an inner strength from something unexplained, or having a prayer answered or having been saved from death or danger by some unexplained intervention of a supernatural nature. 25% of discussed experiences associated with nature – a sunrise, thunderstorm, a rainbow, the waves or the sea. – 16% of the interviewees described spiritual experiences associated with a place. Whether this was ground zero, Coventry cathedral, a mosque or a cemetery depended on other life experiences, associations with people and association with family or friends. 10% certainly found it difficult to explain in terms other than the supernatural.

*"There was this time – something spiritual when the angel took my hand. I went to Covent Garden. Was it the acting or the music - Ecstasy – only happens a few times. I would say that is spiritual."*

The researchers decided that these intense experiences are too personal to be recorded and that some would be too long to report, but as at least 20% of interviewees had had some kind of what they described as a spiritual experience. These experiences were extremely important to them and their lives, but the intimate nature of these experiences make it unethical to report. In 6% of these interviews the tape was turned off. What was significant was that these older people had lived rich and full lives had, at sometime in their lives, had supernatural experiences.

*"Sometimes there is something that can be explained by scientific reasons, but sometimes there is no way to explain them – not any other means"*<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> Interviewee from Taranaki

<sup>69</sup> Interviewee from Waikato

<sup>70</sup> Kapiti Coast interviewee

<sup>71</sup> Taranaki interviewee

## **4.Recomendations**

### **4.1 Greater awareness of spiritual well-being**

That all educational, communities and religious institutions generally should recognise that a significant number of older people demonstrate an awareness of their spiritual dimension. Therefore, community groups should recognise people's need to achieve spiritual well-being, not necessarily in ways traditionally associated with a religion;

### **4.2 Celebration of spirituality**

That communities, schools and religious institutions set up festivals and events that recognise and celebrate the spiritual dimension of people and community life. These could include music, dance and events that encompass enjoying the environment. The promotional packaging of these events should give a wider meaning to the word spiritual and encourage people to experience emotional awe at beauty, creativity or peace;

### **4.3 "Secular" including a spiritual dimension in lives**

That society in general should be persuaded to use the word 'spiritual' and start promoting an awareness of the importance of this well-being to a large number of people. This recognition would be in relation to music, community art and the environment. Because for many people this kind of spiritual awareness has enabled them to cope in times of crisis, providing people with an understanding of how to draw strength from spiritual awareness could be helpful to society generally and could enhance the development of social capital;

### **4.4 Ongoing research on spirituality**

That ongoing research be conducted with young people and families to see from their experiences whether the wider definition of spiritual well-being is meaningful, similar or different from the finding of this research of older New Zealanders.

### **4.5 A tool kit produced explaining spiritual well-being**

That a tool kit be produced for not-for-profit community organisations that defines, in the widest sense, spiritual well-being and demonstrates the contribution spiritual well-being makes to enabling people to cope in times of crisis and in the enrichment of living generally;

### **4.6 Discussion encouraged regarding the findings of this research**

That this report be distributed and used to stimulate discussion on spiritual well-being generally, thus acknowledging that a spiritual dimension is seen as part of the human level of existence;

### **4.7 Spirituality as a positive part of our wellbeing**

That people are encouraged to acknowledge that spiritual well-being can be expressed and can enable individuals to express emotions, but can also enable people to cope with situations of distress or crisis. This is a cultural

shift away from the 'stiff upper lip' thinking and towards encouraging people to identify positive emotions with spiritual wellbeing;

#### **4.8 Social capital and community engagement**

That community engagement and the building of social capital for older adults be encouraged, as resilience for many older people is linked to support, positive concern and consultation with family and friends;

#### **4.9 Arts engagement as audience and participant as part of spiritual well-being**

That participation in the arts by older adults, particularly music, writing and poetry be encouraged, and arts should be accessible to all as both participants and audience; this arts engagement providing an outlet for spiritual well-being.

#### **4.10 Role of Spirituality in times of stress**

That society acknowledges a propensity for people in distress to call on their spiritual well-being, and responds by providing access to places of prayer, to say mantra or meditate. Access needs to be available to places of worship for longer hours, including evenings. Access or locations should be provided in the same way that hospitals and international airports have multi-faith chapels and provide people with a quiet place to have this "time out" or "reflective time".

In places like Indonesia and Malaysia there are prayer rooms available everywhere. Although this might not be necessary in New Zealand, maybe churches could look at ways to balance their security worries with being open for personal meditation for longer hours.

## Appendix I – Questionnaire

### Spiritual well-being: Older people in New Zealand

The discussion topic focussed firstly on the meaning of spirituality, then on superstition, then on coping with crisis times and finally on questions of formal religion. Throughout this discussion, the interviewees were asked to share stories.

The interview session was introduced as follows: “We would like to talk about your spiritual well-being, but if you don’t want to talk to me that is fine. You don’t have to answer a question and you can stop this interview at any point or interrupt the questions to give me examples or share your thoughts. This is meant to be an open ended discussion – I want this to be a dialogue.”

Most of the interviews were taped, but this was not always the case. On five occasions the interviewee didn’t want the interview recorded and also didn’t like the interviewer taking notes. These interviews were written up immediately after the interview had taken place. Informed consent forms were signed prior to the interview commencing in all cases, even when the interviewee didn’t give permission for the interviewees to be taped or notes taken.

A meeting was also set up with a Pacific Island Presbyterian Church minister. It was expected the minister would be able to facilitate or arrange up to three individual interviews with members of that church. This didn’t happen, as the Church was suddenly extremely busy with international guests. Instead, the minister set up a focus group of ten people, male and female elders in the church and appeared to be older adults, from New Zealand and abroad. The views of this focus group have been included in the report.

Throughout the other interviews, the questions were only used as prompts to enable the interviewees to connect with their understanding of spiritual well-being. Also, the questions were sometimes linked together in order to create a connected sequence of themes in our discussion. In many situations questions were answered before the question was asked. If there was any ambiguity, the question was asked again, but some of the interviewee just discussed their own ideas about spiritual matters and in two cases the questionnaire was not followed except to try to get the interviewee back on the subject.

The questions and prompts are as follows: Prompts were only sometimes used and are listed below the main question.

**1. First can we talk a little about you?**

Do you mind telling me how old you are?  
Your ethnic background?  
A bit about your history and your family?

**2. For you, I want to take about the words ‘spiritual’ or ‘spirituality.’**

This question was open ended and most of the interviewees just talked, in about 50% of interviews one or more of the following were added as a prompt.  
What do you think these words mean?  
Does this word have a positive or negative meaning for you?  
Does this spirituality have anything to do with beauty/creativity/the environment/music/art, etc?

(Note to question 2: In the case of this third prompt relating to beauty and creativity, this prompt was only used if the definition given didn’t include any of words beauty, creativity, environment, music or art or if the interviewee had mentioned one of these, but only in passing).

**3. The next questions are about what we might call a creator, a God, gods, a higher being.**

Do you believe that there is any kind of higher being/a god/many gods?  
Do you believe that there are spirits/guardians/angels who provide you with some kind of guide in your life?  
Do you think the world was created by a higher being?  
Do you believe in a divine intervention that created the world?

**4. Are you superstitious?**

Can you give me an example?  
Do you have a lucky number/colour - what is luck?  
Do these superstitions ever govern how you behave?

**5. Can you think of a time of crisis, unhappiness or even, a positive, a time of great happiness when it was your spiritual belief system that enabled to cope? Tell me a story.**

What do you do when you are in a crisis situation?  
Do you ever pray/meditate, ask someone/a being for help?  
Do you think there is any external force that can help you at a time of crisis/sickness/death?

**6. Can you describe any incident in your life that you would say was "spiritual"?**

Anecdotal stories/family experience?

**This next series of questions are about how your own spiritual and belief system influences the way you behave or your relationship with others in your family or community?**

**7. Do you have a code of behaviour that comes from spirituality or from any belief systems you had as you grew up?**

Does this spirituality influence your relationships with others?  
Does this spirituality provide you with a code for your conduct?

**8. Do you belong to a formal religious group?**

Tell me about it?  
Does the code of that group influence your behaviour?  
Does that code enable you to decide what is acceptable behaviour and negative behaviour?

**9. Have you taken part in any formal religious ceremony recently and what did it mean to you? (prompts - wedding, funeral - describe)**

The following questions are about you and your identity; just say what comes into your mind. There will be no right or wrong answers.

**10. Is there anything 'spiritual' that makes you feel 'special' or unique?**

**11. What else would you like to discuss or do you have any story you might like to share about your own spirituality or belief system?**

**12. Do you have any questions or anything else you would like to say or discuss that is relevant to this topic?**

## Appendix II – Glossary

In this topic of beliefs, spirituality and ideologies the terms used are occasionally open to different interpretations.

Therefore, for this research project, The Foundation decided to define certain terms at the onset of the research project.

This definition of the words will, we hope, demonstrate that the research is transparent and that the words used are not interpreted through any one ethnic discipline. We have attempted to recognise that there is wide difference in understanding of the meanings of words associated with ideologies and belief systems. Therefore, this draft initial Glossary will be used as a guideline for the researchers and, while it will be open for alteration and change depending on the outcomes of the research, is intended as a way to broaden the debate.

**Belief** – a statement, principle, or doctrine that a person or group accepts as true, an acceptance by the mind that something is true or real, often underpinned by an emotional or spiritual sense of certainty.

**Belief System** – a set of beliefs, especially religious or political beliefs that form a unified behaviour pattern for members of a community or society.

**Culture** – the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, [which] encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.<sup>72</sup>

**Fear** – Unpleasant emotion caused by actual or perceived danger.

**Health/hauora** – '*Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*')<sup>73</sup>. Health connotes emotional, physical, mental, and *spiritual wellbeing*, within the cultural context of the person. In terms of Te Ao Māori, hauora is based on the cornerstones of taha tinana, taha hinengaro, taha wairua, and taha whānau.

**Identity** – The behaviours and personal characteristics which distinguish an individual within a community and by which the person's role and status within that community are defined for themselves and others.

**Ideology** – A coherent system of beliefs, values and opinions of a social group which defines its membership and shapes the way a person thinks, acts, and understands the world.

**Meditation** – The act of thinking about something carefully, calmly, seriously and for some time, or emptying of the mind of thoughts, or the

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<sup>72</sup> UNESCO (2001)

<sup>73</sup> World Health Organisation Constitution, 1946

concentration of the mind on one thing in order to aid mental or spiritual development, contemplation, or relaxation.

**Prayer** – a spoken or unspoken address to a god, a deity, or a saint. It may express praise, thanksgiving, confession, or a request for something such as help or somebody's well-being.

**Religion** – traditional systems by which people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature and relationship with of God, a god or gods, or spiritual reality etc are defined, usually by a formal organisation, church, or established code. Religion generally refers to a formal system of beliefs and practices relating more often to a formal institutional yet occasionally to personal belief system. Some people see religion as a form of control. Religion is a structured expression of spirituality, sometimes a discipline. While spirituality does include belief systems it cannot be defined solely as religion. Rather, religion can be defined as a very structured and developed expression of spirituality.

**Sectarian** - relating to, involved with, or devoted to a single religious group or denomination.

**Stress** – mental, emotional or physical strain caused, by anxiety, external events or an inability to cope with a event or circumstance, symptoms can include raised blood pressure or depression.

**Superstition** – an irrational, but usually deep-seated belief in the magical effects of a specific action or ritual, especially in the likelihood that good or bad luck will result from performing it.

**Tupuna (Tipuna)** – ancestors of Maori (sometimes spirits).

**Well-being** – health (wholeness), happiness and comfort, achieving an optimum level of physical needs and social harmony. It is also seen to have a spiritual aspect which nourishes creativity and social interaction.

**Worship** – the practices, words and rituals, involved in relating to a god or spiritual being.

**Note:** Any definition we found of *spiritual* or *spirituality* was seen as unhelpful. The research sought a meaning for the words and, like the meaning's found in the literature research, the meanings given in the interviews were diverse and wide ranging.

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## Appendix IV– Demographics of participants

These figures seldom add up to the number of interviewees as many belonged to several groups or gave several answers

### Ethnic Diversity

Pakeha/New Zealander	British	Maori	Pacific Island	Asian	European	Canadian
22	4	5	10	4	4	1

Also one interviewee had been blind from birth, two had experienced psychiatric disabilities.

### Religion

None	Anglican	Methodist/ Presbyterian/ United/ Baptist	Roman Catholic	Quaker	Hindu	Islam	Judaism	Buddhist	Other *
8	8	11	3	2	3	1	2	3	12

Religion as children was recorded. Many of the interviewees said they no longer belonged to any religions.

\*Other included: 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist/ Gateway/ Theosophy/ Daoist/ One said Billy Graham/ Hari Krishna, 2 said Christian but unspecified

### Age groups

50 - 59	60 - 65	66- 69	70 - 80	81 - 85	Over 86
5	15	14	8	4	2

### Sex

Male	Female
27	23

### Location of interview

Taranaki	Waikato	Wellington	Kapiti/ Horowhenua
14	21	9	6